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Strategies to Reduce Stress in the Insurance Industry

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Walden University

College of Management and Technology

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Rhonda Bell

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

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Walden University
2017

Abstract

Strategies to Reduce Stress in the Insurance Industry

by

Rhonda Bell

MBA, Ashland University, 2002

BS, Franklin University, 1987

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

August 2017

Abstract

Approximately 40% of American workers report their jobs are extremely stressful. Business leaders who fail to address workplace stress increase employee propensity for poor performance, resulting in diminished profits. Grounded in the person-environment fit framework, the purpose of this single case study was to explore strategies 9 insurance industry leaders in Franklin County, Ohio used to mitigate workplace stress. The 9 insurance leaders who participated in the study work closely with staff, have experience working in stressful work environments, and utilize various tools to reduce stress. Data collected from face-to-face interviews and reviews of organizational documentation were useful for the completion of this study. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, where 5 themes emerged: supportive work environment, improved communications, optimal leadership, increased resources and training, and work-life balance. The study findings exposed strategies insurance leaders could use to mitigate stress, fuel training development, and assist supervisors to recognize stress symptoms, and most importantly, offer or direct employees to services to address symptoms of workplace stress. The findings may prompt business owners to investigate strategies to address their unique situations leading to stress. Business owners might choose initiatives in this study to identify and respond to employees' needs, provide support, and foster environments of tolerance for all employees, thus reducing stress. The implications for positive social change include the potential for business leaders to minimize workplace stress, thereby increasing the propensity for healthier employees, positive career outcomes, and business sustainability.

Strategies to Reduce Stress in the Insurance Industry

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Dedication

I must first give homage to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who made this opportunity available to me. This doctoral study is also dedicated to those individuals who lent their support, time, and understanding during my efforts to complete my Doctorate of Business Administration.

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First, I must thank my Lord and Saviour who made all things possible. I would like to personally thank my family, friends, peers, and study committee. Much of my gratitude goes to Dr. Carol Anne Faint for her advice, understanding, and undying patience exhibited during the completion of my ddoctoral sstudy.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Stress has a major presence in the workplace and a significant impact on employers' operations (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2014). Employers may take a shortsighted view of indirect and direct costs associated with stress (CDC, 2014). According to Chang, Chou, Liou, and Tu (2016), an unhealthy workforce is an unproductive one. Peel, Berry, and Schirmer (2015) stated leaders should cultivate healthy workplaces while recognizing the critical aspects of promoting employees' well-being. Furthermore, Arnetz, Arble, Backman, Lynch, and Lublin (2013) implied that awareness of how employees assess and react to stress is the key to developing and implementing interventions and programs.

Background of the Problem

Researchers found that job stress occurs when employees' physical and emotional responses to the requirement of the job do not match their capabilities, resources, or needs (American Institute of Stress [AIS], 2014; CDC, 2014). Workplace stress costs U. S. industries \$300 billion annually and may originate from characteristics of the work itself, such as excessive workload, social and role-based issues, weak leadership, role ambiguity, and feelings of being unappreciated or undervalued (CDC, 2014). According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics [BLS], 2014), stress accounts for \$26 billion in medical and disability payments and \$95 billion in lost productivity per year. The severity of job stress depends on the magnitude of the demands placed on the employee, the individual's sense of control, and decisions the employee makes in dealing with the demands (AIS, 2014). According to the CDC (2014), two-thirds of Americans indicated work is the

main source of stress in their lives. Business owners experience decreases in organizational production and profitability when company leaders fail to recognize the factors leading to negative workplace stress. MacFadyen (2015) suggested leaders become familiar with the negative consequences of stress and develop strategies to improve employee performance and productivity.

Problem Statement

Negative stress contributes to reduced profits at work (Mansour, 2016). Approximately 40% of American workers report their jobs are extremely stressful (CDC, 2014). The general business problem was leaders' failure to address stress may lead to poor employee performance and diminished organizational profits. The specific business problem is some insurance industry leaders lack strategies to reduce stress.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of the qualitative single-case study was to explore strategies some insurance industry leaders use to reduce stress. The target population for the study was nine insurance leaders located in Franklin County, Ohio who successfully mitigated stress in the workplace. Mansour (2016) indicated stress permeates industries and society, creating challenges for families and the larger population. The study has implications for social change because business owners may use the information from the results to create a harmonious workplace, which might assist employees in developing a healthier and happier lifestyle.

Nature of the Study

Qualitative researchers seek an understanding of the nature of a phenomenon and reveal the essences and meanings of human experiences by interviewing individuals who lived the event or experience or may provide perspective on the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994; Wang, 2013). Yin (2014) explained the qualitative approach is suitable when investigating decision-making strategies to understand what, how, and why business leaders adopt practices. Yilmaz (2013) stated quantitative researchers employ close-ended questions to examine hypothesized relationships among variables measured in numeric and objective ways. Yilmaz further said mixed methods research is a methodological paradigm based on qualitative and quantitative viewpoints, data collection, analysis, and inference techniques to address the investigator's research question. Quantitative and mixed methods were not suitable for the study due to the focus on testing hypotheses.

Mears (2013) said ethnography, narrative, phenomenology, and case study are four research designs to consider when conducting a qualitative study. Mears argued ethnography is a strategy applied to study a cultural group of people in a natural setting over long periods by gathering data through interviews and observations. Ethnography was not appropriate for this study due to the lack of exploration of a cultural group and length of time needed to collect data and complete the research. Narrative researchers seek to collect extensive information about participants to develop a biography or tell life stories (Todhunter, 2016). Narrative inquiry was not appropriate for my study due to the storytelling aspect and time constraints. Moustakas (1994) stated researchers utilize

phenomenological research designed to assess the essence of lived experiences of individuals regarding a phenomenon. I did not use the phenomenological design as I am not seeking information concerning participants' lived experiences. I intended to explore strategies some insurance industry leaders might use to reduce stress.

Yin (2014) defined case study research as investigating contemporary phenomena within a real-life context. Researchers use the case study design to investigate real life with the subjective richness of individuals recounting their experiences in a particular context (Cronin, 2014). I selected the case study design as a means of gaining information on the how and why of decision-making processes, without placing limits on potential responses.

Research Question

The central research question was: What strategies do some insurance industry leaders use to reduce stress?

Interview Questions

1. What contributes to stress?
2. What behaviors exhibited by employees, if any, led to your response to stress?
3. What work-related characteristics or tasks may create stress for employees?
4. What strategies have you implemented to help employees reduce or eliminate stress?
5. What preventive measures help mitigate work-related stress?
6. What impact do preventive and remedial initiatives used to mitigate work-related stress have on organizational profits?

7. What strategies would you recommend to leaders to help employees cope with or eliminate work-related stress to improve production and/or increase profitability?
8. What additional information can you provide to help me understand successful approaches to stress?

Conceptual Framework

Kumar and Antonenko (2014) explained conceptual frameworks are existing bodies of knowledge researchers use for building qualitative research and predicting new phenomena. The person-environment fit (P-E fit) was the conceptual framework guiding my study. Goh et al. (2015) and Takeuchi and Takeuchi (2013) stated the P-E fit theory is a useful framework for investigating individuals' attitudes and behaviors when dealing with stress. Researchers used the P-E Fit theory to explore how the characteristics of the person and environment might influence different responses to overt behaviors, mood, physiological reactions, and mental and physical health (Rauthmann, 2014; Takeuchi & Takeuchi, 2013).

The P-E fit theory applied to the study because the theory explains methods business owners can use to address workplace stress. According to Takeuchi and Takeuchi (2013), the P-E fit theory is useful for researching the causes of stress in the workplace. Takeuchi and Takeuchi (2013) also confirmed the P-E fit theory could aid business owners in the development of strategies to enhance employees' well-being, improve work performance, and decrease the factors leading to low production levels. The application of the P-E fit model in this study proved to generate critical information for business owners to consider when developing strategies to address stress in the work

environment. Business owners willing to make an investment in stress management and intervention can recognize benefits such as enhanced organizational well-being, reduced workplace stress, and improved productivity.

Operational Definitions

Employee disengagement: Employee disengagement is the negative relationship between engagement and burnout affecting employee productivity and performance (Demerouti, Bakker, & Halbesleben, 2015).

Eustress: Eustress is the healthy, constructive outcomes of stressful events and the stress response useful in improving productivity and increasing profitability (Hargrove, Nelson, & Cooper, 2013; Ganster & Rosen, 2013).

Job stress: Job stress is a process comprised of three key components: (a) environmental events and conditions, (b) reaction of a felt experience, and (c) the consequences and responses resulting from exposure to stressors (De Carlo, Falco, Pierro, Dugas, Kruglanski, & Higgins, 2014).

Occupational stress: Occupational stress occurs when employees: lack autonomy and low levels of reward, lack opportunities to learn new skills, and have work or family conflicts result in adverse implications (Bowen, Edwards, Lingard, & Cattell, 2014; Newton & Teo, 2014).

Stress: Stress is an imbalance in an individual's personality due to external factors resulting in psychological, physical, and behavioral change (Malik & Shabhabuddin, 2015).

Work engagement: Work engagement is a positive, affective, or motivational reaction towards the job (Demerouti et al., 2015).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Assumptions are unverifiable facts (Denscombe, 2013). I determine two assumptions might affect the study. First, I assumed a qualitative case study was the best research approach to investigate business leader responses to work-related stress. Second, I assumed the participants selected to investigate ways to reduce stress were knowledgeable and provided information needed to make the investigation meaningful.

Limitations

Limitations are potential weaknesses of the study (Akakandelwa & Jain, 2013). Two potential limitations affected the study. First, the results of the study are not transferable to all businesses and employees. Second, the participants may not recall valuable information during the interview process, limiting the quality of the research.

Delimitations

Delimitations are the boundaries arising from the scope of the study described in the problem and purpose statements (Denscombe, 2013; Simon, 2011). The study has two delimitations. First, the physical inclusion of businesses located in Franklin County, Ohio provided parameters excluding outside businesses. Second, the population of insurance industry leaders knowledgeable about work-related stress initiatives with at least 5 years of leadership experience narrowed the scope of the study by exploring the experiences within one small sector.

Significance of the Study

The study was significant because organizational leaders who successfully prevent, address, or remedy workplace conditions leading to disengaged employees may provide insights to businesses, employees, and researchers seeking a deeper understanding of the impact of workplace stress. Informed business leaders might increase performance through the reduction of stress (McVicar, Munn-Giddings, & Seebohm, 2013). The study impacted social change by identifying and remedying workplace characteristics leading to stress, which, in turn, may create a more harmonious, productive, and profitable work environment. A harmonious work environment may improve personal wellness.

Contribution to Business Practice

The study may contribute to business practice by assisting business owners in reducing workplace stress. Mansour (2016) explained work-related stress leads to employee disengagement and lower organizational profits. Therefore, business executives should seek opportunities to develop and implement strategies to alleviate stress, which might reduce issues in the business practices of organizations (Hargrove et al., 2013; Kushwaha, 2014; Swaminathan & Rajkumar, 2013). The findings might expose strategies to mitigate stress, fuel training development, and assist supervisors to recognize stress symptoms, and most importantly, offer or direct employees to services to address symptoms of workplace stress.

Implications for Social Change

Employees regularly engage with family and community members, attend events, and may be active in church or other social activities. The study might impact social change by addressing the issues related to stress that might affect social interactions. Managers aiming to create a competitive advantage for organizations may do so at the expense of employees, thus resulting in work-related stress. As business performance trumps employee well-being, employees can feel exploited and exhibit behaviors related to workplace stress (Kurz, Bethay, & Ladner-Graham, 2014).

Kurz et al. (2014) indicated stressors act as triggers to work-related stress; however, employees can learn behaviors resulting in positive outcomes for their organizations and communities. Business executives may question how stress contributes to adverse consequences concerning employees' well-being inside and outside of the organization, therefore leading to issues affecting organizational performance (Malik & Shahabuddin, 2015). Enhancing community support and engaging in healthy social activities may create a more vibrant society, enhancing the quality of life.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The purpose of the qualitative, explorative single-case study was to explore work-related stress and job outcomes in the insurance industry. Business executives may question how stress contributes to adverse consequences concerning employees' well-being inside and outside of the organization (Malik & Shahabuddin, 2015). American workers experience stress due to the job, thus affecting physical and mental health

(Greaves, Parker, Zacher, & Jimmieson, 2015; Moura, Orgambidez-Ramos, & Gonçalves, 2014). Therefore, scholars deemed it vital for managers to understand the reasons for workplace stress and the effects stress might pose to productivity (Malik & Shahabuddin, 2015; Moura et al., 2014). Over lengthy periods, managers could find stress becomes a contributor to increased health care costs and lower productivity (Greaves et al., 2015; Newton & Teo, 2014). Consequently, supervisors have a responsibility to their organizations to identify the factors contributing to work-related stress and develop strategies to reduce employees' stress levels (Malik & Shahabuddin, 2015).

In the review, professional and academic literature provided a foundation to explore stress and job outcomes in the insurance industry. I conducted the research using a variety of academic sources by obtaining literature through academic libraries, as well as websites, databases, and books. A search of the following databases to find and retrieve literature included ABI/INFORM Global, Thoreau, Google Scholar, Business Source Complete and ProQuest, which helped to secure sound literature to support my study. To aid in the search of relevant literature relating to my business problem, I utilized the following key words *workplace stress, job stress, occupational stress, stress interventions, employee disengagement, work engagement, productivity, and job satisfaction*. My literature review consists of 206 references containing 187 articles with 182 peer-reviewed articles from the timeframe of 2013-2017, with 97% published within 3 to 5 years of completing my doctoral program. I selected references related to my qualitative research topic and verified the sources are peer-reviewed by utilizing Ulrich's

Periodical Directory. I captured the following themes in the literature review: (a) the P-E fit model, (b) workplace stress, (c) consequences of workplace stress, (d) stress and organizational profits, and (e) workplace stress management strategies.

Person-Environment Fit Model

The P-E fit model was the conceptual framework guiding my study. The P-E fit model is a widely accepted theory in literature about occupational health and well-being (Nolan & Morley, 2014). Researchers utilized the theory to develop an understanding of the relationship between workplace stress and employees' well-being (Nolan & Morley, 2014; Takeuchi & Takeuchi, 2013). Scholars determined the P-E fit model was useful for exploring the causes of stress in the workplace and developing possible strategies to decrease stress and improve productivity (Goh et al., 2015). The fundamental tenets of the P-E fit model are to expose misfit or mismatch of individuals' preferences and organizational deliverables leading to stress. The use of the P-E fit model proved to generate critical information for employers to consider regarding stress and stress intervention planning in the work environment (Goh et al., 2015).

Goh et al. (2015) and Rauthmann (2014) explained that a perceived match between the person and the environment resulting in mental and physical well-being, whereas a perceived mismatch could result in mental and physical stress. The P-E fit model has two components: (a) the degree of match between the demands people confront at work and their abilities to meet those demands, referred to as demands–ability fit; and (b) the match between the person's needs and resources available, referred to as needs–supplies fit (Goh et al., 2015; Nolan & Morley, 2014).

Researchers indicated the P-E fit theory is a unifying analytical tool used to incorporate both individual and environmental factors within the context of stress in the workplace (Goh et al., 2015). Within the boundaries of the P-E fit theory, three major types of fit give rise to an examination. The needs-supplies (NS) fit is the fit between individual needs and extrinsic (pay/benefits) and intrinsic (job autonomy and relationship support) provisions supplied by the environment (Goh et al., 2015). The demands-ability (DA) fit is beneficial when considering skills, knowledge, time, and energy needed to meet environmental demands including work hours, production, and role expectations (Goh et al., 2015; Rauthmann, 2014). Supplementary fit is the similarities between individual characteristics of people and other individuals in their social environment (Goh et al., 2015).

Nolan and Morley (2014) indicated the P-E fit theory might offer a conceptual and operational framework for assessing the degree to which interventions promote active coping. Takeuchi and Takeuchi (2013) further stated the P-E fit theory allows the researcher to study the members' interactions when pursuing the respective needs and demands to promote productive interdependence at work. Lastly, Nolan and Morley (2014) noted the P-E fit framework adds valuable insights to the psychological experience of employees exposed to and who experience stress in the workplace.

There are many theoretical models used by researchers to evaluate the effects of workplace stress. Takeuchi and Takeuchi (2013) explained the critical importance of researchers to understand how different theories emerge, and decide the theory best fitting to analyze the issue under investigation. My intention was to utilize the P-E fit

theory to explore work-related stress and strategies to reduce stress. I did not use other theories such as Lazarus transactional theory, balance theory, or conservation of resources (COR) theory.

Lazarus and Folkman (1987) utilized the transactional theory to explore the causes of stress arising from the appraisal of environmental demands while taxing individuals' resources, and therefore threatening well-being. Lazarus and Folkman used the transactional framework to focus on cognitions and perceptions or appraisals mediating the response to stressful events within certain environments. The two types of appraisals used in the Lazarus Transactional theory included (a) primary - the person acknowledges something is at stake, and (b) secondary - the person evaluates the availability of coping resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1987).

Lazarus and Folkman (1987) utilized the transactional theory to concentrate on what people think and do in a stressful encounter, representing a process-oriented approach and providing insights into the nature of the stress process. The Lazarus transactional theory places emphasis on personal appraisals, thus giving insufficient attention to the environment (Lazarus, 2001). For this qualitative study, I did not utilize the Lazarus Transactional theory.

Heider's (1958) balance theory described the process mechanisms of social actors such as a focal person having positive or negative cognitions about other individuals and issues. Chang and Cheng (2014) defined balance theory as a lens for understanding the relationships between any two or more entities. The balance theory is a triad of a person, another person, and an entity (Yap & Harrigan, 2015).

Accordingly, individuals seek a balance between the affective states (pleasantness or harmony) and the cognitive structure (Chang & Cheng, 2014; Yap & Harrigan, 2015). There are four emerging areas of application of the balance theory: impact of the work system on worker performance, multilevel analysis of the work system, understanding the non-work sphere, and application to employee well-being and safety (Chang & Cheng, 2014). Therefore, I do not believe the balance theory was appropriate for my study.

The COR theory is a theoretical model developed by Hobfoll (1989). Van Woerkom, Bakker, and Nishii (2016) stated the principle of the COR theory is the notion that stressful circumstances lead to lost resources. Chang and Cheng (2014) indicated researchers use the COR theory to examine the interaction between the individual and the environment and the degree of correspondence between environmental demands and the individual's resources to deal with demands.

Similar to the P-E fit theory, the COR theory incorporates objective indicators of fit whereas the P-E fit model focuses on individual's perceptions of fit (van Woerkom et al., 2016). To cope with job demands, individuals strive to build, protect, foster, and retain personal characteristics, energies, and conditions to navigate through life's demands and challenges (van Woerkom et al., 2016). I did not utilize the COR theory due to my intention to obtain leaders' perceptions concerning workplace stress, as opposed to objective measures of stress.

Workplace Stress

Many business executives want to improve productivity and increase profitability without considering the essential key to success, the human factor (Gerr et al., 2014;

Sohail & Rehman, 2015). Employees are the foundation for growth in the global market and provide organizations with prospects to gain a competitive advantage and maintain sustainability (Boyd & Gessner, 2013; Verne, 2014). Employers must determine what factors lead to a decrease in profitability and poor employee performance (Bowen et al., 2014).

Greaves et al. (2015) stated the three key components of job stress are (a) stressors, (b) reaction of a felt experience, and (c) psychological, physical, or behavioral outcomes resulting from exposure to stressors. Moreover, Newton and Teo (2014) argued stress poses a threat to the health of workers and organizations. American employees reported the workplace is the primary contributor to stress (Moura et al., 2014; Newton & Teo, 2014).

Greaves et al. (2015) and Newton and Teo (2014) stated stress is a common social problem affecting every aspect of employees' lives. Likewise, Moura et al. (2014) indicated job stress is an occupational hazard leading to impaired physical health, psychological well-being, and performance. Every so often, business managers seek opportunities to update processes and computer systems but fail to recognize the factors leading to work-related stress impacting employees' performance and overall organizational well-being (Arnetz, et al., 2013).

According to Arnetz et al. (2013), employees' assessments and reactions to stress are key factors in developing and implementing interventions and programs. Arnetz et al. (2013) further stated employees need interventions and coping tools to address life crises leading to stress. Employers need interventions and coping tools to address stressors and

stress reactions, encourage positive work behaviors, improve performance, and increase organizational profitability (Arnetz et al., 2013; D'Ettorre & Greco, 2015).

Stress. Mellor, Smith, Mackay, and Palferman (2013) defined stress as an adverse reaction people exhibit when exposed to excessive pressures or other types of demands placed on the parties. Swaminathan and Rajkumar (2013) claimed stress could be a dynamic condition of any individual challenged by an opportunity, constraint, or demand related to an aspiration, expectation, or outcome perceived to be vital but uncertain. Liu, Liu, Mills, and Fan (2013) challenged the stress definition by indicating stress is a major occupational problem due to the destructive influence on workers' health, productivity, and companies' profit. Yong, Nasterlack, Pluto, Lang, and Oberlinner (2013) stated stress becomes evident when a mismatch between job demands and resources triggers a series of negative reactions.

Hargrove, Nelson, and Cooper (2013) said employees who experience stress in the workplace might encounter feelings of dissatisfaction due to high job demand, limited job control, and inadequate support. Goh et al. (2015) expanded the concept by adding stress as a predictor of many outcome variables, such as organizational commitment, turnover intentions, job satisfaction, and job performance, all of which significantly affect a company's profitability and productivity. Likewise, MacFadyen (2015) argued a similar perspective by indicating workplace stress might originate from the job, excessive workload, weak leadership, communication issues, lack of resources, and limited or no training.

Taking a different stance, Fida, Paciello, Tramontano, Barbaranelli, and Farnese (2015) emphasized internal frustrations such as lack of resources, red tape, workplace politics, or things going wrong, as factors which affect employees' ability to perform their job adequately and add to work-related stress. Moreover, Montero-Marin et al. (2013) defended the definition of stress by adding stress causes discomfort in the physical environment, organization, and individual conditions and may result in employees' exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy in the workplace. Babatunde (2013) expanded the stress definition, arguing stress is a stimulus comprising the characteristics of the environment and causing strain reactions in individuals exposed to such external features, situations, or environmental factors. Babatunde also indicated workload, excessive pace, low autonomy, external disturbances, and toxic environments align with the definition of stress provided by the other stress researchers.

Distress and eustress. Kozusznik, Rodríguez, and Peiro (2015) differentiated between distress and eustress. Kozusznik et al. defined distress as the appraisal of stressors as sources of harm or threat. In contrast, eustress is the appraisal of stressors as opportunities or challenges individuals regard as satisfying (Fida et al., 2015; Kozusznik et al., 2015).

Kozusznick et al. (2015) indicated the evaluation method individuals use to appraise a situation becomes essential to the stress experience and outcomes. Kozusznick et al. also argued appraisals of eustress and distress can coexist and occur simultaneously in response to the same stressor. Fida et al. (2015) indicated work-related issues could be both an opportunity and a source of stress. Kozusznick et al. cautioned against

overemphasizing propitious appraisal of stress due to the temporary nature of eustress; thus, causing individuals not to employ preventive coping strategies to reduce the undesirable outcomes of distress.

Lazarus (1993) described distress as the appraisal of stressors as potential sources of harm or threat. Employees might develop job dissatisfaction and psychological distress due to a fear of the potential effects of crises in the workplace (Giorgi, Arcangeli, & Cupelli, 2013). When examining work-related stress, perceived dysfunctions of the working environments are main predictors of different health outcomes and reflect the greatest threats to employee well-being (Giorgi, Shoss, & Leon-Perez, 2015). Furthermore, Lornudd, Tafvelin, von Thiele Schwarz, and Bergman (2015) emphasized the psychosocial environment of the workplace includes both beneficial or detrimental factors affecting employees' health or well-being.

In contrast to distress, eustress becomes helpful when employees use stress to achieve goals or accomplish job duties resulting in enhanced performance. Hargrove et al. (2013) stated eustress relates to health and well-being, thus resulting in better work performance. Individuals might experience eustress when the appraisal of a stressor benefits the individual's well-being (Hargrove et al., 2013; Kozusznick et al., 2015). Hargrove et al. (2013) suggested individuals experiencing eustress describe the experience as (a) a focused state of challenge, (b) a healthy state of aroused attention to a task, and (c) an exhilaration. To help minimize or eliminate distress, managers can develop long-term prevention plans for the organization and teach employees how to turn negative situations into positive ones (Hargrove et al., 2013). For eustress to provide an

advantage to the employer, supervisors must address factors in the organizational layout failing to align with employees' expectations resulting in workplace stress (Hargrove et al., 2013).

Consequences of Workplace Stress

Employees reported the workplace is the main contributor to stress (Moura et al., 2014; Newton & Teo, 2014). Likewise, Moura et al. indicated job stress is an occupational hazard leading to impaired physical health, psychological well-being, and performance. According to Arnetz, Arble, Backman, Lynch, and Lublin (2013), business managers should seek opportunities to update processes and computer systems but fail to recognize the symptoms of stress impacting employees' performance, and overall organizational well-being.

Role stress. Schmidt et al. (2014) said role stress might occur in the workplace, causing employees to exhibit behaviors and provide responses triggered by differences in organizational life and perceptions of individual roles within the workplace. Researchers explained role stress is a cognitive appraisal process moderating the relationship between organizational stressors and the responses following the stressors (Schmidt et al., 2014). In response to role stress, employees reply by exhibiting health-related behaviors leading to absences and mental disorders resulting in depression or job strain (Moura et al., 2014; Schmidt et al., 2014). Moura et al. (2014) explained role stress might cause employees to experience role conflict, role ambiguity, or both simultaneously. Lastly, Moura et al. identified role conflict and role ambiguity as organizational factors associated with burnout.

Role conflict. In a quest to determine how individual roles can lead to workplace stress, researchers discovered employees might experience role conflict (Moura et al., 2014; Semmer et al., 2015). To garner an understanding of role conflict, employers must first comprehend roles and conflict from the employees' perspective, and consider the factors inducing stress in the workplace (Moura et al., 2014; Semmer et al., 2015). In the workplace roles become part of employees' identity or value, thus helping individuals to defend against discouraging evaluations of the functions (Moura et al., 2014; Semmer et al., 2015). Pluut, Curseu, and Flestea (2014) argued employees who occupy multiple roles might experience role conflict when the pressures of one role become incompatible with the pressures of another role. Likewise, Pluut et al. emphasized the role strain or scarcity viewpoint occurs when finite personal resources diminish, and engagement in multiple roles drains the pool of resources faster than one can replenish needed resources. In turn, Lindberg, Wincent, and Ortqvist (2013) defined role conflict as increased perceptions of inadequacy in the work roles, which implies employees realize the difficulties in obtaining validation for efforts.

Standifer, Lester, Schultz, and Windsor (2013) challenged the definition of role conflict by indicating the conflict becomes a social process, whereby one party perceives another negatively affect an item, situation, circumstance, or place of great concern or caring. Standifer et al. also argued three types of role conflict exist in the workplace including process conflict involving disagreements about task process, task conflict relating to differences concerning elements task, and relationship conflict concerning disputes of an emotional nature. In contrast, Schmidt, Roesler, Kusserow, & Rau (2014)

argued there are two types of role conflict which includes objective role conflict resulting from the environment and subjective role conflict due to environmental conditions.

Role conflict occurs when supervisors exert more than one pressure on an employee, and the roles conflict with each other causing psychological stress (Moura et al., 2014; Semmer et al., 2015). When facing role conflict, employees must extend greater efforts to evaluate and enact fitting coping responses and minimize the effects of the stressor (Lindberg et al., 2013; Moura et al., 2014). As well, employees might face strain due to the direct and indirect conflict between their individual interactions and work environments (Thompson & Gomez, 2014). Role conflict occurs when the demands placed on employees are incompatible or are at odds with other functions required by the employer (Lindberg et al., 2013; Thompson, & Gomez, 2014). As a final thought, role conflict might lead to employee frustration, and the dissatisfaction may result in decreases in the organization's productivity and bottom-line (Lambert, Minor, Wells, & Hogan, 2015).

Role ambiguity. Hill, Chenevert, and Pointras (2015) defined role ambiguity as a hindrance stressor influencing how employees approach their interpersonal interactions and projecting pessimistic feelings associated with uncertainty towards others at work. Lambert et al. (2015) and Lindberg et al. (2013) stated role ambiguity arises when the employees lack performance information such as the responsibilities expected in the role, behavioral responsibilities, and hierarchy of responsibilities to define roles. Hill et al. stressed role ambiguity correlates adversely with performance, organizational citizenship behavior, satisfaction, and commitment. Conversely, role ambiguity links with tension,

absenteeism, and turnover intentions (Hill et al., 2015). Lindberg et al. (2013) and Thompson and Gomez (2014) explained role ambiguity places workers in a position of uncertainty regarding the performance of job duties and the potential rewards or repercussions of their actions. Chiu, Yeh, and Huang (2015) further stated role ambiguity can lead to deviant behavior (or employee deviance) which might threaten the well-being of an organization, its members, or both. Both Chiu et al. and Lindberg et al. expressed employee deviance might lead to a damaging impact on individual employee and organizational performance, resulting in sizeable decreases to the organization's profitability.

Employees experience role ambiguity due to a lack of information, resulting in the absence of clarity when trying to understand their job positions (Schmidt et al., 2014). Moreover, employees might experience distinct events producing increased role ambiguity (Hill et al., 2015). Employees might suffer from two types of role ambiguity due to objective role ambiguity, which refers to certain conditions in the individuals' environment; and subjective role ambiguity which relates to some uncertainty individuals perceive to exist in their environment (Thompson & Gomez, 2014). Role ambiguity might either decrease or increase over time, and the direction of change is representative of the nature of an employee's adaptation to the job (Hill et al., 2015; Thompson & Gomez, 2014).

Burnout. Increasing global, economic, technological trends might induce organizational administrators to require more effort and motivation from workers, increasing stress and burnout (Avanzi, Zaniboini, Balducci, & Fraccaroli, 2014). Lings,

Durden, Lee, and Cadogan (2014) stated employers might benefit by determining the causes of employee burnout. When job demands exceed the resources available to employees, burnout arises with consequences affecting the workers' psychological well-being and job performance (Lings et al., 2014). The American Institute of Stress indicated stress is a factor in 80% of work-related injuries and 40% of employee turnover (APA, 2012). Moreover, burnout costs organizations billions of dollars in disability and workers' compensation claims, absenteeism, pre-absenteeism, and lost production (Lings et al., 2014).

Whitebird, Asche, Thompson, Rossom, and Heinrich (2013) asserted work-related stress is an intense emotional state persisting for any extended period. Workplace stress occurs when employees suffer intense emotions ignited by various experiences caused by different situations (American Psychological Association [APA], 2015; Whitebird et al., 2013). Stress might evolve from workplace or relationship issues resulting in an employee's positive or negative emotional reaction to the situation (APA, 2015; Whitebird et al., 2013).

When stress becomes chronic and lasts for extensive periods, burnout becomes the outcome undesirable affecting both employees and the organization. Stress and burnout can be harmful to employees' physical and emotional health (APA, 2015). Burnout is a ruinous state resulting from psychological, emotional, and mental exhaustion developed from continuing involvement in demanding, emotionally charged situations (U. S. National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health [NIOSH], 1999; Whitebird et

al., 2013). Burnout results when employees become overwhelmed and no longer possess the desire or capacity to function at work (Lings et al., 2014; Whitebird et al., 2013).

Lings et al. (2014) emphasized the components of burnout are causally related to emotional exhaustion, developed from excessive demands and depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment is a consequence of emotional exhaustion. In turn, Shuchang, YanJunya, Johnna, and Opler, (2014) argued burnout is a psychosomatic syndrome characterized by the three core dimensions of emotional exhaustion including feelings of depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. Burnout can adversely impact occupational factors such as workload, control, reward, community, fairness, and values; therefore, resulting in emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and feelings of reduced personal accomplishment (Avanzi et al., 2014; Whitebird et al., 2013). Employees who suffer from burnout exhibit adverse behaviors, which affect organizational value, competence, and performance (Khalatbari, Ghorbanshiroudi, & Firouzbakhsh, 2013). Rogers, Creed, and Searle (2014) said burnout can be a contributor to workers' stress-related illnesses, low job satisfaction, unprofessional behaviors, withdrawal, decreased job performance, and turnover. Furthermore, Avanzi et al. (2014) declared burnout is not always a consequence of job dissatisfaction or unrealistic job demands placed on employees by supervisors.

Avanzi et al. (2014) argued employees wanting to perform well or excel in their careers could over commit to the job and organization. Over-commitment is an employee-initiated behavior characterized by excessive amounts of job involvement and effort made to achieve personal or organizational goals (Avanzi et al., 2014). Moreover,

Avanzi et al. emphasized employers consider over-commitment an expectant and desirable attitude among employees because it induces hard work and high levels of activity. However, employers fail to recognize the threat to the employees' well-being or capacity to continue the newly found level of commitment (Avanzi et al., 2014). In over-commitment situations, employers should realize employees may exaggerate their efforts and employ maladaptive strategies to cope with increasing job demands, thus, exposing themselves to severe emotional exhaustion (Avanzi et al., 2014). Employers should counter employee burnout and its consequences (absenteeism and reduced performance) by discouraging attitudes characterized by excessive efforts and an inability to detach self from work obligations (Avanzi et al., 2014).

Role overload and underload. Employees experience role overload when supervisors impose requirements to handle too many tasks and duties without supplying the necessary resources to accomplish the job responsibilities (Lambert, Minor, Wells, & Hogan, 2015). Matthews, Winkel, and Wayne (2014) stressed role overload consequences become evident when individuals function in different roles within the workplace and cannot meet all demands of the assigned tasks. Furthermore, employees experience role overload when expectations and demands become impossible to handle because of time and energy restrictions (Lambert et al., 2015; Lindberg et al., 2013). Employees face role overload when there is an expectation for the individuals to do more, be responsible for more, or perform more than what is possible given the resources and abilities related to the role (Lindberg et al., 2013).

Lambert et al. (2015) affirmed role underload leads to stress. Role underload is the perception of underutilization at work (Lambert et al., 2015). Furthermore, employees suffering from role underload might experience feelings of boredom and frustration, hence, not fully engaging at work (Lambert et al., 2015).

Job demands and job resources. Moura et al. (2014) stated job demands are physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of work necessitating physical and psychological effort (cognitive or emotional) linked with certain physiological and/or psychological costs. Moura et al. defined job resources as physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the job which reduce job demands and physiological and psychological costs, improve goal achievements, and stimulate personal growth, learning, and development. Lavoie-Tremblay, Trépanier, Fernet, & Bonneville-Roussy (2014) added to the job demands and resources argument by claiming individuals use social interactions to gain resources to improve their environment, resulting in lower perceptions of injury or risk. Job demands and resources correlate with positive and detrimental outcomes and are typical in certain occupations (Moura et al., 2014; Lavoie-Tremblay et al., 2014).

Job demand and strain. Organizational administrators believe employees maximize every effort to perform their jobs, which might include the acceptance of increased job demands (van Doorn & Husheger, 2015). Job strain results when employees suffer from increased demands, instigating mental and physical fatigue (van Doorn & Husheger, 2015). Van Doorn and Husheger emphasized the interplay between job demands and resources might explain strained reactions in the environment. Job

demands refer to physical, social, and job aspects requiring sustained cognitive, emotional or physical efforts (Lavoie-Tremblay et al., 2014; van Doorn & Husheger, 2015). Employees' performance and job aspects requiring prolonged physical and mental efforts might result in costs associated with physiological and psychological strain (Lavoie-Tremblay et al., 2014). Various elements of the environment present the potential for inducing high levels of job stress for employees and their organizations (Lavoie-Tremblay et al., 2014). Van Doorn and Hulsheger defined job strain as the affected state of an employee's health and well-being, resulting from the negative effects of increased job demands and lack of job resources operating within the broader psychosocial context of the environment.

Job resources refer to physical, psychological, social, and organizational aspects of the job. Job resources are energy reservoirs individuals tap into when there is a need to cope with overwhelming demands (Lavoie-Tremblay et al., 2014). Job resources should be functional in achieving goals or should play a part in reducing job demands (Lavoie-Tremblay et al., 2014; van Doorn & Hulsheger, 2015).

Wang et al. (2014) stated job stress is a modern epidemic and is a linkage between stress and the effects adversely impacting the workplace. Wang et al. (2014) indicated job stress becomes commonplace in the workplace when top-level bosses fail to develop and implement strategies to address growing concerns having an impact on workers' health and compensation, insurance costs, and social welfare systems. As modern workplaces face changes due to increasing globalization, enhanced technology, and

competition, business leaders wanting to remain competitive should address the factors leading to employees' stress and strain (Tucker et al., 2014; Vander Elst et al., 2014).

Employees spend a considerable percentage of time at work, and strain can result due to physiological and psychological functioning (Tucker et al., 2013; Vander Elst et al., 2014). Over the course of an employee's working life, job strain may develop due to pressures in the workplace or overexposure to job stress (Vander Elst et al., 2014).

Tucker et al. argued individuals are not independent of the environment but find their lives nested with the jobs, departments, organizations, and industries. Therefore, employees' lives may become stressful, and if the stress continues, strain results. In various studies, researchers found a causal association between job strain and negative occupational outcomes, and job strain and sickness absences (Wang et al., 2014).

Wang et al. (2014) stated business managers must consider employees' job control, psychological demands, and comprehend the how the contributions of these factors might lead to workplace stress. Wang et al. described job control as the employee's decision authority and skill discretion in the confines of duties. In direct conflict with job control, employees might face psychological demands (conflicting demands and pressure) which might result in job strain (Tucker et al., 2013; Wang et al., 2014).

Wang et al. (2014) indicated job strain produces low strain, active work, passive work, and high strain. Therefore, business managers have a responsibility to address workplace strain, manage employee stress, and develop preventive interventions (Tucker et al., 2013). Supervisors can accomplish these tasks by focusing on individuals' job

control, job plan, social context, and workplace culture (Tucker et al., 2013).

Furthermore, administrators should invest money and time to assess employees' perceptions regarding the lack of job control, threats concerning growth or gain, and factors leading to stress (Vander Elst et al., 2014).

Symptoms associated with workplace stress. Babatunde (2013) explained primary sources of workplace stress are the components having to do with the content and context of work. Lavoie-Tremblay et al. (2014) and Kushwaha (2014) asserted stress might originate from factors intrinsic to the job roles. Employers might find job roles cause a disparity between demands and an individual's capability to cope (Babatunde, 2013; Lavoie-Tremblay et al., 2014). Further, Yong et al. (2013) claimed job-related stress effects ("strain") are the critical consequences of occupational stressors.

Yong et al. (2013) stated some workplace conditions have the potential of producing disparaging outcomes, which could impair employees' mental health and physical well-being. Babatunde (2013) suggested working conditions might play a role causing job stress, posing health risks, and disrupting the well-being of employees. Moreover, workload, work pace, low autonomy, external disturbances, and toxic systems might contribute to the deterioration of employees' health (Hargrove et al., 2013; Schmidt et al., 2014).

Marinaccio et al. (2013) indicated socio-demographic and occupational variables might contribute to work-related stress. Moreover, the role and responsibility individuals hold within the organization, task objective, and level of control over duties might generate stress (Babatunde, 2013; NIOSH, 1999). Employees could suffer from stressors

originating from issues regarding career development, relationships, organizational structure and climate (Babatunde, 2013).

The average employee feels some stress at work as a regular part of the job (BLS, 2012). However, some employees experience stress to the point it causes illnesses and time away from work (BLS, 2012; NIOSH, 1999). Workers take approximately 20 days off work because of stress, anxiety, or a related disorder (BLS, 2012). The BLS (2012) classified any illness or absence due to stress as a neurotic reaction to stress.

According to NIOSH (1999), stress sets off an alarm in the brain, thus, prepping the body for defensive action. The nervous system releases hormones, which sharpen the senses, quickens the pulse, deepens respiration, and tightens the muscles. NIOSH indicated this response (often called the fight or flight response) is important because it helps us defend against threatening situations. Jay et al. (2014) declared stress might have pervasive consequences affecting emotional, physical, cognitive and behavioral wellbeing. Symptoms of stress might include mood and sleep disturbances, upset stomach and headache, disturbed relationships (personal and professional), frustration, fatigue, headaches, chest pain and rapid heartbeat, forgetfulness, disorganization, and tense muscles (Jay et al., 2014; NIOSH, 1999).

When supervisors and managers fail to understand employees are the primary source of competitive advantage, employees' performance may suffer and cause unnecessary stress (Swaminathan & Rajkumar, 2013). In certain situations, supervisors might treat employees as dispensable commodities while exploiting workers' efforts for maximum production (Swaminathan & Rajkumar, 2013). Eventually, supervisors realize

the consequences associated with work-related stress (Jourdain & Vezina, 2014; Wan, Downey, & Stough 2014).

Stress and Organizational Profits

Regardless of the type of position or duties performed, employees experience some form of stress in the workplace (Kurz et al., 2014). American employees work long hours to complete tasks and the intense amount of work might cause stress (Kurz et al., 2014; NIOSH, 1999). Employers must learn to recognize stress and find measures to address adverse behaviors and illnesses in the workplace (Kurz et al., 2014; NIOSH, 1999). Ultimately, managers should strive to create environments conducive for easing stress (Kurz et al., 2014; NIOSH, 1999).

Employers must become aware of factors inhibiting progressive relationship or interactions between staff and employees (Kurz et al., 2014). Employees' heightened levels of stress might lead to unwanted outcomes, decreased productivity and performance, and staff turnover, thus reducing profits (NIOSH, 1999; Wan et al., 2014). Researchers recognize there is a correlation between workplace stress, employee engagement, and organizational profits (Menguc, Aug, Fisher, & Haddad, 2013).

Employee engagement. Musgrove, Ellinger, and Ellinger, (2014) defined employee engagement as employees involved in developing their work roles and wanting to perform the duties associated with the job. Despite the importance of employee engagement to organizational success, researchers suggested employers do not have the tools to keep employees engaged at work (Roof, 2015). Engaged employees are cognitively, psychologically, and physically present at work and performing in an

organizational role (Musgrove, Ellinger, & Ellinger, 2014). Engaged employees possess high levels of energy and exhibit enthusiasm towards completing duties (Idris, Dollard, & Tuckey, 2015).

Idris et al. (2015) capitalized on the idea employees' engagement increases when business principals create an atmosphere to safeguard employees' mental and promote professional growth. Immersed in the work, engaged employees take proactive and committed stances aimed at producing at quality standards (Roof, 2015). Musgrove et al. (2014) and Idris et al. (2015) indicated companies with higher levels of employee engagement showed higher levels of profits.

Idris et al. (2015) linked a stress-free climate with employees' performance and work engagement. Shuck and Reio (2014), and Saks and Gruman (2014) explained engaged employees are less likely to stress about their jobs. Menguc et al. (2013) explained employees' interpretation of the environment defines their degree of engagement. Shuck and Reio (2014) asserted engaged employees are more productive, remain at work, positively interact with customers, and help to generate revenue. Engaged employees exhibit enthusiasm, energy, and passion about completing their duties (Menguc et al., 2013). In contrast, disengaged employees have a vicious mindset, thus, impacting customer service and organizational outcomes (Shuck & Reio, 2014). Disengaged employees are apathetic, robotic, and withdrawn from the work (Menguc et al., 2013).

Employee disengagement. Researchers determined workplace stress is a key differentiator of employees' job satisfaction and well-being (McCarthy, Lambert, &

Reiser, 2014). Employees' engagement may vary across time, tasks, experiences, and customer encounters (Huang, Chiaburu, Zhang, Li, & Grandey, 2015). When there is an imbalance between emotional efforts and resources, employees can suffer increased strain and dissatisfaction (Huang et al., 2015).

Huang et al. (2015) found employees might construe their daily tasks as boring, mundane, or taxing, thus, lacking challenge or satisfaction. In turn, employees experiencing authentic emotions and the feelings of job accomplishment are likely to feel satisfaction (Huang et al., 2015). Fila, Paik, Griffeth, and Allen (2014) defined job satisfaction as a pleasurable state an employee derives from a job appraisal or experience. In contrast, researchers indicated job dissatisfaction could lead to employee disengagement and disastrous outcomes (Fila et al., 2014). D'Ettorre and Greco (2015) reported persistent and high levels of occupational stress might reduce organizational profits resulting in lost effectiveness of the organization.

Through organizational and stress research, investigators discovered there is a correlation between stress and job satisfaction (Fila et al., 2014; Khamisa, Oldenburg, Peltzer, & Ilic, 2015). Investigators emphasized the effects of stress is just not consequential for employees but can have grave consequences for executives and their organization (Fila et al., 2014). In stress-related studies, researchers indicated job satisfaction might result in varying outcomes for employees and their organizations (Fila et al., 2014; Khamisa et al., 2015). In workplace stress research, researchers indicated directors might redesign jobs to alleviate employees' stress levels while maintaining productivity (Fila et al., 2014).

Work engagement. Demerouti et al. (2015) defined work engagement as the positive motivational reaction towards the job. Van De Voorde, Van Veldhoven, and Veld (2016) argued work engagement is the level to which employees commit to the values, vision, functioning, and performance of the organization. Roof (2015) stated work engagement becomes evident when employees exert efforts toward work resulting in enjoyment. Despite the importance of work engagement, managers fail to recognize the connection between organizational outcomes, workers' productivity, and commitment (Roof, 2015).

Roof (2015) emphasized job satisfaction occupies the same conceptual space as job engagement, but job engagement encompasses energy and activation. Leary et al. (2013) argued supervisors play a pivotal role in improving the relationship between leadership tendencies and profits, job satisfaction, and burnout. Senior managers can stimulate work engagement by employing safe environments, stress management initiatives and interventions, and management support and commitment (Idris et al., 2015). To achieve gratifying organizational outcomes, administrators have a responsibility to purport job engagement and employee satisfaction to improve performance and profits (Idris et al., 2015; Roof, 2015).

Performance, productivity, and stress. Employees contribute to the achievement of organizational goals through high-level performance and productivity (Hallett & Hoffman, 2014). Van De Voorde, et al. (2016) stated individual and collective performance of employees is central to the success of any organization. Demerouti et al.

(2015) indicated work engagement is a valid predictor of job performance and enhanced satisfaction.

Organizational administrators often overlook the impact of job stress on employee performance (Sears, Shi, Coberley, & Pope, 2013). Rost, Hongdao, and Stanley (2014) stated productivity and profit losses are corporate values foregone due to stress-related issues. Researchers argued employers suffer economic and productivity burdens resulting in employees' absences or low engagement (Sears, Shi, Coberley, & Pope, 2013). Van De Voorde, et al. (2016) examined the outcomes associated with job stress, thereby uncovering a wide range of ill effects including the loss of productivity and profits.

Given the importance of the relationship between stress and productivity, investigators recognized the workplace plays a central part in the stress intervention process (Sun, Buys, & Wang, 2013). Hallett and Hoffman (2014) elucidated stress produces caustic impacts workers on cognitive, emotional, and physiological levels. When employees face stressful situations at the job, there may be negative consequences affecting their emotional and physical well-being (Moreland, 2013; Saks & Gruman, 2014). Employers have a responsibility to keep workers engaged, thereby maximizing profits and productivity for the organization (Sun et al., 2013).

Workplace Stress Management Strategies

Swaminathan & Rajkumar (2013) indicated stress became a widespread epidemic due to increased global competition, liberalization, privatization, and demands of the sellers' markets in the wake of globalization. Consequently, every employee may

experience some form of stress due to the pressure of the workplace or duties (Kushwaha, 2014; Liu et al., 2013). Kushwaha (2014) argued stress becomes harmful when the pressures of work lead to long-termed, excessive, or non-beneficial effects. Kushwaha and Swaminathan and Rajkumar increased stress levels could improve performance and the quality of life. Both Kushwaha and Swaminathan and Rajkumar stated excessive stress could create a loss in its beneficial effect and may cause substantial harm to the organization and workers.

Kushwaha (2014) emphasized employers may find it impossible to remove all stressors from the work environment. Managers should work to identify which aspects of the work environment cause the most difficulties for employees and strive for improvements (Kushwaha, 2014). Directors wanting to build healthy, stress-free organizations must learn to differentiate between the types of demands placed upon employees and their stress levels (Hargrove, et al., 2013; Liu et al., 2013).

Managers can take advantage of the link between task-related demands and employees' personal development (Hargrove et al., 2013; Kushwaha, 2014). Furthermore, business executives must seek opportunities to develop and implement strategies to alleviate stress which might also reduce serious business complications for their organizations (Hargrove et al., 2013; Swaminathan & Rajkumar, 2013). Before developing and implementing stress management and intervention processes, employers should strive to understand stress and how stress can impact employees (American Heart Association [AHA], 2015; Kushwaha, 2014).

Employers should become aware of the factors leading to stress in the workplace (Kushwaha, 2014). Hargrove et al. (2013) and Kushwaha (2014) argued supervisors should recognize the early signs of employees experiencing stress. Supervisors might discover employees suffering from stress may exhibit changes in behavior, attitude, or appearance (AHA, 2015; Kushwaha, 2014). Employees might display changes in performance due to elevated stress or exhibit behaviors associated with absenteeism and reduced social contact (AHA, 2015; Kushwaha, 2014). Further, employees may show signs of regression (emotional behaviors) or aggressive behavior (AHA, 2015; Kushwaha, 2014). The AHA (2015) indicated individuals might display both physical and emotional signs of stress, hence affecting the individuals' ability to perform duties or report to work.

Patching and Best (2014) declared stress management and intervention plans are essential to improve the health of the organization and its employees. Organizational directors must understand the linkage between stress, physical and mental health, productivity, and profitability (Kushwaha, 2014). Corporate leaders should utilize their understanding of stress to create healthy environments for workers (NIOSH, 1999).

Employees experiencing stress are less productive and cost the organization in increased absenteeism, presenteeism, low production, and higher health care costs (NIOSH, 1999; Kushwaha, 2014). Managers must recognize stress might prompt harmful responses to the requirements of the job that are not in alignment with the capabilities, resources, or needs of the workers (NIOSH, 1999). Despite extensive research, organizational bosses fail to understand the causes, effects, and management of

stress (Hargrove et al., 2013; Kushwaha, 2014). Supervisors need to recognize working conditions play a significant function in causing stress and affect workers' safety and health (Hargrove et al., 2013; Kushwaha, 2014). Finally, Yiwen, Lepine, Buckman, and Feng (2014) argued organizational principals might impact employees' stress levels due to the type of leadership style and work-related stressors.

Kurz et al. (2014) identified a correlation between stress and disparity in job demands and rewards, therefore leading to decreased profitability. Stressed staff oftentimes feel unsupported by coworkers and supervisors, and use maladaptive coping strategies to perform work assignments (Kurz et al., 2014). Employees' stress might emerge from an imbalance in the working relationship and environment (Astvik & Melin, 2013; Kurz et al., 2014).

Astvik and Melin (2013) and Kurz et al. (2014) argued not all stress leads to bad experiences, in many situations employees can benefit from stressful experiences. Employees who perform well under pressure exhibit behaviors of eustress leading to positive feelings and enhanced well-being. Astvik and Melin further expressed employees can experience stressful situations but learn to cope when resources meet or exceed demands and rewards are proportional or exceed efforts.

Astvik and Melin (2013) determined increased individual responsibilities combined with a high workload and insufficient resources, force coping strategies to the forefront of understanding stress and employee health. Business executives should recognize wellness (physical) and well-being (psychological) of their employees are crucial for organizational success and survival (Hargrove et al., 2013). Managers who

ignore stress, may see a perilous demise to the normal business operations (Astvik & Melin, 2013). Managers who strive to obtain eustress (healthy, constructive outcome of stressful events and the stress response) improve productivity and increase profitability (Hargrove et al., 2013).

Sun, Buys, and Wang (2013) argued stress management is cost-effective, keeps people employed, improves productivity, and increases profits. Employees can learn to appraise stress and learn to cope when resources become available to manage demands of the performance tasks (Hallett & Hoffman, 2014). Through training, employees can develop the ability to perform during stressful times (Hallett & Hoffman, 2014).

Appraisal. Lazarus (1999) defined appraisal as an individual's initial evaluation of a situation eliciting a positive or negative interpretation of events or environments to determine one's well-being. Lazarus further indicated individuals evaluate situations by employing two types of appraisal: primary and secondary. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) defined primary appraisal as the assessment of a situation to determine whether a threat or stressor is present or might cause harm to an individual's well-being. Lazarus and Folkman indicated secondary appraisal involves making a judgment about whether the person can cope with a stressor; then, deciding how to deal with the stressor. Lazarus also indicated the secondary appraisal could generate emotions or meanings attributable to the event or situation allowing the individual to move from thinking to action.

Coping. Lazarus (1995) characterized coping as the reasoning efforts a person utilizes to manage demands draining resources. Lazarus (1999) classified coping acts as a mediator of the emotional outcome of an encounter with a perceived stressor. Taking a

different approach to the definition, D'Arcy, Herath, and Shoss (2014) described coping as primarily concerned with an individual's response to psychological stress after experiencing stress.

D'Arcy et al. (2014) explained the cognitive appraisal of stress is the first step in the coping process. Individuals experience two interrelated forms of appraisal which are primary and secondary, which could give rise to coping efforts aimed at alleviating stress (D'Arcy et al., 2014). In the primary appraisal phase, the person evaluates the importance of a situation and whether it is benign or stressful (D'Arcy et al., 2014). In the secondary appraisal phase, the person evaluates whether there is possession of the needed control to handle the stressful situation (D'Arcy et al., 2014).

Lazarus (1995) described two main types of coping: problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping. Problem-focused coping occurs when the individual modifies overt behavior to change the environment (Lazarus, 1995). Emotion-focused coping transpires as the individual seeks to manage emotional distress associated with the stressor (Lazarus, 1995). The problem-focused coping is instrumental in helping people to focus attention on situation-specific goals to achieve a sense of mastery and control working to attain goals (Lazarus, 1999). D'Arcy et al. (2014) added to Lazarus' assessment of problem-focused coping by indicating the appraisal process involves direct efforts to manage or alter the stressful situation. Therefore, individuals strive to eliminate obstacles impeding workflow or activities to increase one's knowledge and skills (D'Arcy et al., 2014).

D'Arcy et al. (2014) and Lazarus (1999) affirmed emotion-focused coping involves cognitively shifting negative thinking into positive impacts. The resulting positive values become apparent when certain conditions occur and the need for coping is necessary (D'Arcy et al., 2014; Lazarus, 1999). Lastly, D'Arcy et al. argued inward-focused coping involves cognitive processes directed at easing emotional distress in times the individuals have limited controllability in modifying the stressful situation.

Stress assessment. Swaminathan and Rajkumar (2013) stated stress became a widespread epidemic due to increased global competition and demands of the sellers' markets in the wake of globalization. Consequently, every employee may experience some form of stress due to the pressure of the workplace or duties (Kushwaha, 2014; Liu et al., 2013). Stress becomes harmful when work pressures lead to long-termed, excessive, or non-beneficial effects (Kushwaha, 2014; Liu et al., 2013).

Kushwaha (2014) emphasized employers may find it impossible to remove all stressors from the work environment. Managers should work to identify which aspects of the environment cause the most difficulties for employees and strive for improvements (Kushwaha, 2014). Directors wanting to build healthy, stress-free organizations must learn to differentiate between the types of demands placed upon employees (Hargrove, et al., 2013; Kushwaha, 2014). Managers can take advantage of the link between task-related needs and workers' personal development (Swaminathan & Rajkumar, 2013). Business executives can seek opportunities to develop and implement strategies to alleviate stress, which might decrease the harmful effects stress can have on an organization (Hargrove et al., 2013). Kushwaha further argued supervisors should

recognize the early signs of employees experiencing stress. Supervisors might discover employees suffering from stress may exhibit changes in behavior, attitude, or appearance (AHA, 2015; Kushwaha, 2014). Employees might display changes in performance due to elevated stress or exhibit behaviors associated with absenteeism and reduced social contact (AHA, 2015; Kushwaha, 2014). Moreover, the AHA (2015) indicated individuals might display both physical and emotional signs of stress, affecting the individuals' ability to perform duties or report to work.

Stress management and intervention plans are essential to improve the health of the organization and employees (Patching & Best, 2014). Managers must recognize stress might prompt harmful responses to the job (NIOSH, 1999). Therefore, managers should create a healthy environment for workers (NIOSH, 1999; Patching & Best, 2014).

Stress assessment process. McVicar, Munn-Giddings, and Seeborn (2013) and Patching and Best (2014) described the stress assessment process as complex and complicated by managers' lack of understanding of the causes of stress. Senior directors must acknowledge employees face both internal and external stressors (Kushwaha, 2014). Ozer, Chang, and Schaubroeck (2014) argued managers should conduct stress assessments before determining interventions to manage work-related stress exclusive to the organization. McVicar et al. stated directors should assess workplace stressors before identifying strategies for reducing the effects attributed to occupational stress. Employers should regularly assess the workplace for critical components to understand employees' stress levels (Kushwaha, 2014; McVicar et al., 2013). These initial assessments set the stage for developing the best interventions (Peel, Berry, & Schirmer, 2015). Finally, Peel

et al. reasoned the assessments become necessary because managers can see the link between stress organizational performance, productivity, and employee and customer satisfaction.

In many instances, executives fail to link stress with issues relating to employees' health and psychological well-being (Peel et al., 2015). Employers and staff should collaborate to understand the factors leading to stress and devise plans to address stress individually and corporately (Ozer et al., 2014; Patching & Best, 2014). Ozer et al. argued leaders should apply a participatory approach to assessing factors relating to stress and search for solutions right for their organizations. When selecting interventions, managers might strive to improve environments, reduce stressors, and improve employees' mental health (Ozer et al., 2014). Furthermore, Mellor et al. (2013) maintained employers and employees to work should together to identify psychosocial risks and adopt solutions to minimize stress-related risks.

Stress management. Patching and Best (2014) indicated stress might result due to the causation of a complex interaction of individual characteristics and issues in the work and external environments. Ozer et al. (2014) said the achievement of healthy environments requires transformational changes, with stress management and interventions targeted towards addressing workplace and organizational factors contributing to stress. Therefore, business managers must consider methods or program to alleviate stress in the organization (Ozer et al., 2014; Patching & Best, 2014).

Patching and Best (2014) stated the environment and culture of the organization could affect the success of the stress management program. Ozer et al. (2014) argued

employers might help employees manage stress by instituting open and honest communication, addressing behaviors, and rewarding employees for congenial efforts. Moreover, Ozer et al. emphasized employees need to feel included in the business, thus having a sense of security and belonging to cope with the effects of workplace stress.

Business administrators can seek the assistance of stress management professionals to develop and implement programs to limit the impact of stress in the workplace (Ozer et al., 2014). As part of the process, managers must provide employees with the tools to recognize issues or situations giving rise to negative stress and develop mechanisms to cope (Ozer et al., 2014; Patching & Best, 2014). Employees participating in stress management programs may become aware of stress through the appraisal process (Ozer et al., 2014). By learning efficient methods of coping, employees can alter stress -related behaviors in the workplace (Ozer et al., 2014).

Interventions. Patching and Best (2014) argued the implementation of stress management interventions in the workplace could be beneficial for individuals and the entire employee population. McVicar et al. (2013) reinforced the idea of employees' appraisals of stressors, and the capacity to cope might challenge supervisors' attempts to understand work-related stress. To achieve the best outcomes from stress management interventions, employers must present a spirit of collaboration by creating a social climate of learning (McVicar et al., 2013).

Directors should provide employees with multi-level participation in the interventions (McVicar et al., 2013). The individuals choosing and implementing the intervention process should develop an awareness of behaviors undermining the

interventions and take corrective measures (McVicar et al., 2013; Patching & Best, 2014). Employers' commitment to the intervention programs becomes essential when stress affects organizational performance and profitably (Ozer et al., 2014; McVicar et al., 2013). Furthermore, McVicar et al. argued employers are more forthcoming in offering stress management interventions and prevention programs when senior managers recognize economic or employer-focused benefits.

McVicar et al. (2013) stated stress management may promote a healthy environment for all employees if employers implement interventions to address the sources of stress. Employers may utilize interventions to manage stress-related behaviors before irrevocable damage occurs for employee or organization (Ozer et al., 2014). At the individual level of intervention, relaxation, and cognitive-behavioral techniques might improve an individual's psychological resources and responses (Ahmeti, 2014; Ozer et al., 2014). While at the organizational level, job adjustment and communication may improve the occupational context (Ahmeti, 2014; Ozer et al., 2014).

Probst (2013) indicated interventions include: primary (eliminating the cause of stress), secondary (enabling employees to manage stress), and tertiary (aiding employees). Ozer et al. (2014) added to the discussion by indicating primary interventions occur at the organizational level while secondary or tertiary prevention occurs at the individual level. Ozer et al. further stated organizational level interventions could reduce the cause of stress and improve job adjustment and communication. Ozer et al. and Probst stated individual level interventions might influence employees to manage psychosocial, physiological, and organizational stress.

In the intervention process, employers and healthcare professionals can utilize a variety of techniques. Some methods employers use in the intervention process include self-management, relaxation, behavioral modification, and physical activity (McVicar, 2013; Ozer et al., 2014). Individual and group interventions should encompass techniques to improve appraising and coping processes in stressful situations (Ozer et al., 2014). McVicar said stress initiatives may entail prevention and wellness programs, health and safety initiatives, employee assistance programs, and in-house psychologist. Verne (2014) stated companies could implement healthy eating initiatives, allow fitness breaks, and offer 24-hour mental health hotlines to manage work-related stress. In addition to physical and psychological wellness programs, managers have begun to realize an employee financial wellness program might assist employees to reduce stress and increase overall well-being (Verne, 2014).

Throughout organizational exploration, researchers discovered there is a correlation between stress and job satisfaction (Fila et al., 2014). Investigators emphasized the effects of stress is just not consequential for employees but can have grave consequences for employers (Fila et al., 2014). Fila et al. found stress to be a recurring theme centered on the demand placed on employees and the resources available to accomplish job tasks. In stress-related writings, researchers placed emphasis on job satisfaction which produces positive outcomes for employees and organizations (Fila et al., 2014). Due to the finding from stress research, investigators indicated managers might need to redesign jobs to alleviate employees' stress levels while maintaining productivity (Fila et al., 2014).

Transition

In Section 1, I presented an explanation for the need of a qualitative case to explore what strategies business leaders can develop and implement to reduce workplace stress. The aim of the study provided a foundation for business leaders to consider when developing and implementing strategies to combat employees' stress. The findings of the inquiry assisted leaders to identify possible strategies to help reduce employees' stress levels, improve productivity, and increase profits. Included in Section 1, the following sections added relevance to the research: a foundation of the study, the problem and purpose statements, research question, the conceptual framework, operational terms, the significance of the feedback, and review of the literature. Section 2 includes a discussion defining the roles of the researcher and participants in the data collection process. In addition, Section 2 contains detailed descriptions of data collection, data analysis, data management, and validity and reliability in relations to my study. Finally, Section 3 encompasses the study results, implications, and recommendations for future research.

Section 2: The Project

In Section 2, I provided the purpose of the study and discussed and justified the roles of the researcher and participants. I described the research process used to ensure validity, reliability, and transparency in the research. Section 2 includes a description of the research method and design and the techniques and strategies necessary to ensure the validity, reliability, and transparency in the findings. Included in the data collection section, I described the procedures for protecting human subjects. The data analysis consisted of examining, categorizing, tabulating, and testing evidence to produce empirically based findings. This section includes a description of the data collection, data organization, and analysis processes necessary for the completion of the research.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of the qualitative single-case study was to explore strategies some insurance industry leaders use to reduce stress. The target population for the study was nine insurance leaders located in Franklin County, Ohio who successfully mitigated stress in the workplace. Mansour (2016) indicated stress permeates industries and society creating challenges for families and the larger society. The study has implications for social change by assisting business owners in creating a harmonious workplace, which might assist employees in developing a healthier and happier lifestyle.

Role of the Researcher

Yin (2014) suggested the researcher is the primary instrument in the research process. Roberts and Kim (2014) indicated researchers seek to answer questions

essential to the lives of the participants and society. As a researcher, I possessed the expertise to assemble the necessary data to complete a reliable and valid investigation.

I navigated the interview process, guided by consistent questioning, to gather information related to the experiences and perspectives of selected participants. During the inquiry process, the researcher seeks to gain knowledge from the participants about a contemporary phenomenon (Roberts & Kim, 2014). Furthermore, it is imperative investigators maintain a neutral researcher-participant relationship and abide by ethical obligations (Rossetto, 2014). In the study, the intent was to work collaboratively with participants demonstrating leadership and transparency. I had no personal or business relationship with the study participants. I was familiar with the impact of workplace stress and employers' needs to increase performance and profitability due to working in a service organization.

Yin (2014) stated interviews are commonly found in case study research, thus guiding conversations. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) stressed the line of inquiry is likely to be fluid rather than rigid. In the interview process, the researcher has two primary functions to: follow the line of inquiry as reflected in the study protocol and ask conversational questions in an unbiased fashion (Yin, 2014).

Gagnon and McCabe (2015) defined the interview location as both the physical space and place where power dynamics, social relations, identities, and meanings unfold. The interview area is valuable for understanding the interactions between the researcher and participant situated in proper context and becomes an active element in the interview

and research processes (Gagnon & McCabe, 2015). As a word of caution, Porter (2015) stressed there is no perfect location to conduct qualitative research.

The job of the researcher is to consider the positive and negative aspects of the selected interview location (Porter, 2015). McGrath (2015) indicated researchers should choose an interview location conducive for open communication, active listening, and respectful interaction between the participant and researcher. For the best cooperation, the researcher should conduct face-to-face interviews at the time and place chosen by the participant (McGrath, 2015). I conducted the semistructured face-to-face interviews in a scheduled conference room at the selected organization.

In the research process, Malone et al. (2014) stated that it is virtually impossible to eliminate bias; however the researcher should take measures to minimize known biases. Malone et al. further indicated a researcher's awareness of potential bias increases the likelihood of implementing strategies to reduce bias and enhance the validity and reliability of the inquiry. Simundic (2013) declared researchers need to construct, conduct, and report research transparently and honestly.

To reduce bias, I employed various strategies including triangulation of multiple sources for the integration of broad perspectives, strict adherence to the interview protocol, and separation of personal views from the data collection processes to remain open to other perspectives. An interview protocol is a document I developed prescribing a step-by-step strategy for contacting, interviewing, recording, and analyzing collected data and reporting findings. Yin (2014) indicated a protocol can enhance the reliability of research and might help in reducing bias.

Participants

When conducting case studies, researchers must gain access to participants with experience regarding the phenomenon (Peticca-Harris, deGama, & Elias, 2016; Yin, 2014). Lamb, Backhouse, and Adderley (2016) indicated researchers should target participants in a timely, effective, and efficient manner to prevent costly extensions and delays in determining study results. Cleary, Horsfall, and Hayter (2014) said participant selection in any qualitative research should have a clear rationale and fulfill a specific purpose relating to the research question. The criteria used to select participants included leaders who possessed leadership responsibilities in the insurance industry in Franklin County, Ohio, held a leadership position for approximately five years, worked in stressful work environments, and was knowledgeable in developing and implementing stress management strategies.

To conduct the exploratory case study, I selected insurance leaders who had knowledge regarding stress and used strategies to mitigate stress in the workplace. Yardley, Watts, Pearson, and Richardson (2014) and Yin (2014) stated a small sample size is suitable for qualitative exploratory case studies. Robinson (2014) asserted the four-point approach to qualitative sampling may include defining a sample universe, determining sample size, devising a sampling strategy, and sourcing the sample. Following Internal Review Board (IRB) approval, I purposefully solicited nine leaders from the insurance industry to obtain varying views concerning workplace stress and solutions to eliminate or minimize employees' stress.

Kidney and McDonald (2014) argued trust is necessary to yield participatory inclusion and authentic responses to the interview questions. Bell (2013) affirmed the qualitative researcher should conduct an in-depth study by building an appropriate relationship with participants. Bell further stated the relationship is central to the investigation and established through the recruitment process, initial contact, the research interview, and any follow-up contact. Furthermore, Yardley et al. (2014) indicated the relationship built between participants and the interviewer is crucial to the research users and the researchers. I developed interactive, honest, and professional relationships with the participants.

Research Method and Design

The core of a good study rest in the method and design used for information. Yin (2014) underscored the importance of using the central research question as a guide to determine the best method and design for research. After an exhaustive search for an appropriate method and design to investigate workplace stress, I determined a qualitative case study was the best approach for conducting the study.

Research Method

Wang (2014) said researchers should choose from between three methods of inquiry: qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods research. Moustakas (1994) and Wang (2014) indicated qualitative research is a method used to seek an understanding of the nature of a phenomenon, revealing the essence, and meaning of lived human experiences. Newman, Ridenour, Newman, and DeMarco (2003) and Yilmaz (2013) also explained quantitative researchers should employ close-ended questions to examine

hypothesized relationships among variables measured in numeric and objective ways. In most cases, researchers use a quantitative approach to investigate occupational stress (Yilmaz, 2013). While researchers use a quantitative method to add to the field of study, the quantitative approach has limitations due to the researchers' assumptions (Yilmaz, 2013). During the quantitative inquiry, participants respond to a survey and answer close-ended questions (Barnham, 2015). Mixed methods is a methodological paradigm based on qualitative and quantitative viewpoints, data collection, analysis, and inference techniques to address the investigator's research questions (Barnham, 2015).

Quantitative and mixed methods research approaches are not appropriate for this study due to the numeric component. The qualitative method was appropriate for the study and used to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon (mitigating stress) through an interview process and organizational documentation.

Research Design

A qualitative researcher chooses an appropriate design to conduct research (Mears, 2013; Yin, 2014). Mears and Yin indicated ethnography, narrative, phenomenology, and case study are four research designs to consider when conducting a qualitative study. Mears asserted ethnography is a strategy applied to study a group of people in a natural setting over long periods by gathering data through interviews and observations. Ethnography was not appropriate for the study due to the examination of a cultural group and length of time needed to collect data and complete the research. Narrative researchers seek to obtain extensive information about participants to develop a biography or tell life stories (Todhunter, 2016). Narrative inquiry was not appropriate for

my study due to the storytelling aspect and time constraints. Moustakas (1994) stated researchers utilize the phenomenological research design to assess the essence of lived experiences of individuals regarding a phenomenon. I did not use the phenomenological design, as I did not seek information concerning lived experiences.

In this case study, I explored the perspectives of business leaders regarding stress in the workplace. Yin (2014) defined case study research as a logical plan of inquiry used to investigate contemporary phenomena within a real-life context. Researchers use the case study design to investigate real life with the subjective richness of individuals recounting their experiences in a particular context (Cronin, 2014). Yin further stated the case study design supports the exploration of a specific phenomenon and allows for the inquiry into a phenomenon within a specific, current perspective.

Researchers utilize case studies to explore existing and future issues in regards to the situation under investigation (Yin, 2014). Likewise, researchers use case studies to converge data collection, applying triangulation through the processes of interviews, observations, questionnaires, literature reviews, and documents (Morse, 2015; Yin, 2014). In the study, I established a suitable sample size for interviews based on the availability of candidates meeting the criteria to partake and continued to interview participants until data collection reached saturation. Jensen, Christy, Gettings, and Lareau (2013) indicated researchers achieve data saturation when interviews add no new information, and at that point, the discussions stop. I stopped the data collection process when no new information emerged during the interviews. After the data collection

process, the researcher conducts an analysis of the data to build comprehensive and convincing study results (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Morse, 2015).

Population and Sampling

The population selected for the study included insurance industry leaders. A sample of nine participants in Franklin County, Ohio was appropriate to investigate the contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real context by exploring individual perspectives. Duan, Bhaumik, Palinkas, and Hoagwood (2014) noted researchers attain greater detail when investigating a small number of cases; however, they indicated multi-case studies might help confirm external validity.

Yin (2014) suggested a single case study, interviewing a large enough sample to ensure saturation, may ensure external validity. Jensen et al. (2013) underscored the importance of providing an appropriate sample size, adding the process of saturation confirms the appropriateness of a sample size. I used a sample of nine participants located in Franklin County, Ohio. The participants were appropriate for the study as businesses in Franklin County, Ohio possess the information needed to understand stress in similar insurance companies throughout the United States.

A researcher estimates sample size, draws from a candidate pool who meet criteria to participate in the research, and continues to interview participants until the study reaches saturation (Jensen et al., 2013). Moreover, Jensen et al. concluded data saturation improves the generalizability of the research. My goal was to interview nine participants working in the insurance industry. I continued to interview the participants

until the discussions failed to generate new information, therefore reaching data saturation.

When a researcher fails to reach data saturation, snowball sampling is appropriate to acquire additional participants for the interview process (Emerson, 2015). Guro and Malin (2015) defined snowball sampling as a popular sampling method used to generate knowledge from participants' recommendations of individuals with information about the issue. Waters (2015) argued snowball sampling is a highly effective sampling technique used to help researchers reach hidden populations. Accordingly, Griffith, Morris, and Thakar (2016) stated researchers might use snowball sampling to locate additional participants with relevant information about the issue. I achieved data saturation; therefore, snowball sampling was not necessary for this study.

For the exploratory case study, I utilized a purposive sampling strategy. Robinson (2014) and Yin (2014) indicated sampling is central to the practice of qualitative research. Palinkas et al. (2013) and Griffith et al. (2016) noted purposive sampling has two advantages: first, purposive sampling increases the likelihood of accessing rich information, and second, purposive sampling creates efficiencies in honing the most informative candidates to enhance the value of data collected. When establishing the sample universe, the researcher specifies the inclusion or exclusion criteria (Robinson, 2014). The criteria used to select participants included leaders who possessed leadership responsibilities in the insurance industry in Franklin County, Ohio, held a leadership position for approximately five years, worked in stressful work environments, and were knowledgeable in developing and implementing stress management strategies.

Ethical Research

Kidney and McDonald (2014) stated researchers should develop their studies to promote integrity, thus guarding against misconduct and impropriety. Adams and Miles (2013) stated the Belmont Report is a historical document that defines the guiding principles of ethical research. The three principles of the Belmont Report, respect for the person, justice, and beneficence (Manton et al., 2014), are fundamental to the ethical constructs of the study. Adams and Miles and Manton et al. said the principle of respect represents two premises: the requirement to acknowledge autonomy and the obligation to protect those with diminished autonomy. The principle of justice referred to fairness in the distribution of benefits or equal treatment of all persons (Adams & Miles, 2013; Manton et al., 2014). Beneficence is ethical treatment used to secure a person's well-being (Adams & Miles, 2013; Manton et al., 2014).

Katz (2013) indicated IRBs are in place to ensure the protection of human subjects used in research. The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) stated certain populations such as children, pregnant women, mentally challenged, and prisoners as vulnerable populations and need protection (Katz, 2013). The IRBs members work to ensure the rights and welfare of the research subjects, the proper safeguards are in place to protect vulnerable populations, and the required consent for human participation in a study (Katz, 2013). The Belmont Report is the foundation used to protect vulnerable research subjects; the IRB ensures researchers utilize the proper safeguards to protect these individuals (Katz, 2013). I followed the guidance set by Walden's IRB and followed the direction established in the Belmont Report to ensure participants'

confidentiality in providing information. The IRB reviewed and approved my application for the study. My approval number is 11-21-16-0476305.

Researchers must prepare to discuss informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity protocols, and member checking processes with participants (Kidney & McDonald, 2014; Tilley, 2015). Also, researchers must provide all potential interviewees with the goal of the study, participation requirements, voluntary nature, anonymity protection, and information for informed consent (Robinson, 2014; Yin, 2014). I sent each participant a consent form explaining the purpose of the study, the role of the researcher, and the confidentiality measures. The body of the consent form included comprehensive information about the study.

Researchers should inform participants of the right to abstain from participation in the study or to withdraw consent at any time (Kidney & McDonald, 2014). Participants have a right to withdraw without researchers forcing a justification for the withdrawal or questioning the participant's decision, even implicitly (Kidney & McDonald, 2014; Yin, 2014). Before conducting the interviews, participants received information concerning their right to withdraw from the study. To withdraw, I asked the participant to submit a written withdrawal via email. I did not offer any incentives to participants for engaging in the interview process.

Sanjari et al. (2014) explained investigators must protect the participants from any harm due to the research (Kidney & McDonald, 2014; Yin, 2014). Kidney and McDonald argued the trust aspect is necessary to yield participatory inclusion and honest responses to the interview questions. I instituted measures to protect the research

participants from any harm before, during, and after the reviews, and assigned the participants pseudonyms including an initial and corresponding number to conceal identities and ensure confidentiality. Further, all information secured on a flash drive is accessible only by me, and all hardcopy materials remain locked in a cabinet then destroyed after 5 years.

Kidney and McDonald (2014) stated researchers should develop their studies to promote integrity, thus, guarding against misconduct and impropriety. Researchers could employ member checking to achieve both reliability and validity (Tilley, 2015). Kidney and McDonald defined member checking as a process, researchers use to ensure the interpreted data is the information provided by the participant during the data collection process. In the member checking process, participants review the transcribed data for accurate interpretations or changes (Kidney & McDonald, 2014; Tilley, 2015). To enhance the reliability and validity of the data collection process, I utilized member checking.

Data Collection Instruments

In the research process, I was the primary data collection instrument. An interview protocol guided the interview process. According to Owen (2014), the researcher is the primary instrument in the data collection process. As the primary instrument in the single case study, I collected data from an insurance company operating in Columbus, Ohio. I conducted semistructured interviews with business leaders who successfully implemented stress management and intervention programs. The case study interview protocol is a description of the procedures and rules guiding the research (Yin,

2014). I used an interview protocol to guide my study, following the step-by-step guide to ensure reliability in data collection process.

Hilgert, Kroh, and Richter (2016) contended face-to-face interaction compels small talk, nonverbal communication, empathy, and connectivity from participants regarding the issue under question. Researchers might use face-to-face interviews to gain participants' confidence and support (Hilgert et al., 2016). Owen (2014) indicated researchers' participation in the data collection process allows opportunities to observe participants and maintain a position of objectivity during the study. I asked the participants the same eight interview questions to elicit conversation concerning stress. With the permission from the participants, I recorded the interviews using a digital recorder and used pencil and paper to document non-audible responses. At the end of the interview sessions, transcription of the recordings and field notes aided the researcher in the preparation of the data for analysis.

Udtha, Nomie, Yu, and Sanner, (2015) claimed data collection is a critical component of research and a central factor in determining the cost and success of a research project. Researchers can utilize numerous strategies, including focus groups, face-to-face and telephone interviews, mailings, electronic mail (e-mail), and online questionnaires (Internet) in the data collection process (Udtha et al., 2015). Anderson and Handelsman (2013) underscored researchers' need for purposeful evidence supported by peer-reviewed literature and member checking to support reliability and validity of the findings. Houghton et al. (2013) defined member checking as the process of returning a summary to participants to ensure the accurate recording of the interviews; hence,

becoming credible records. To enhance the reliability and validity of the data collection process, I used member checking to ensure the accuracy of the participants' responses collected during the interview.

Yin (2014) stated the participants involved in the interviews provide their perspectives by responding to prepared questions and play an active part in the data collection process. I conducted interviews with nine participants to collect the data to develop the findings. The other instruments used in the study included interview questions, a tape recorder, paper and pencil to record physical nuances, and document reviews. I also used an interview protocol to ensure consistency during the interview process.

Yin (2014) explained an interview protocol (see Appendix D) is a written procedure used by researchers to ensure consistency in the interview process. Yin indicated the interview protocol is a step-by-step format for gaining informed consent, arranging and conducting interviews, and completing member checking (see Appendix D). I used an interview protocol to guide the interview process to reduce potential bias in the interview process and to support repeatability of the research method.

Data Collection Technique

Mazerolle and Goodman (2013) explained researchers could utilize a case study to gain a holistic evaluation of the real-life experiences as provided by participants.

Cronin (2014) stated researchers use the case study design to investigate real-life with the subjective richness of individuals recounting their experiences in a particular context. I

selected the case study design to gather information on the how and why of decision-making processes, without placing limits on potential responses.

Hilgert et al. (2016) claimed the advantage of using an interview approach includes consistency in ensuring each participant responds to the same questions. Hilgert et al. indicated an interview technique enhances the richness of the responses through visual cues, contextual data such as physical characteristics, and verbal data. explained a disadvantage of using interviews may include participants' varying non-verbal cues or the researcher's misinterpretation of visual cues (Hilgert et al., 2016). I used data triangulation which included face-to-face interviews and reviews of organizational artifacts such as policies, procedures, training protocols, and statistical data to support my findings. Also, I asked the participants to respond to the same eight open-ended questions (see Appendix C).

Data Organization Technique

As a researcher progress towards completing a study, the need to gather and organize accumulated data becomes increasingly valuable (Yin, 2014). Glaser and Laudel (2013) indicated data management is vital to the success of the qualitative research. After the collection of data, researchers' responsibilities shift to data organization including the extraction of themes and coding to find meaningful and referenced information (Glaser & Laudel, 2013; Yin, 2014).

Researchers should keep accurate, comprehensive records of the activities employed in the data collection and analysis processes (Yin, 2014). To assist in the collection and analysis processes, Glaser and Laudel (2013) recommended using a

database management system. As an extension to the use of recordings and paper to record interviews, Glaser and Laudel stated electronic databases and analysis tools are available to researchers to conduct field studies. Researchers can utilize databases to: organize data, access information, simplify data, extract themes, and coding (Glaser & Laudel, 2013; Yin, 2014). Accordingly, Yin stated databases tie together related data and serve as a central portal to query, locate, integrate, and interpret data. Researchers found databases provide a dedicated area to promote a simplified approach for organizing, categorizing, integrating, and retrieving data to address their interests (Yin, 2014).

Yin (2014) indicated the researcher might find the creation of a case study database beneficial for the separation and orderly compilation of collected data. According to Baskarada (2014), the database may include interview transcripts, investigator notes, documentary evidence, and preliminary analysis. Researchers should categorize, index, and cross-reference all items in the database to facilitate easy retrieval (Baskarada, 2014; Yin, 2014). Lastly, Yin stated case study databases provide a vehicle for readers to scrutinize the researcher's raw data, which leads to interpretations and conclusions. I utilized a database to organize the collected data from the interview process, literature review, and organizational documents such as policies, procedures, training protocols, and statistical data. All information will remain secured on a flash drive accessible only by me, and all hardcopy materials will remain locked in a cabinet then destroyed after 5 years.

Data Analysis

Researchers conducted the analysis of the data to build comprehensive and convincing results (Morse, 2015; Yin, 2014). Bredart, Marrel, Abetz-Webb, Lasch, and Acquadro (2014) indicated researchers employ various techniques to structure and maintain the focus of the qualitative research and analysis. Yin stressed the collection of data such as interviews, documents, and direct observations help to validate the research findings. Marshall and Rossman (2016) posited researchers use the research question and related literature as guidelines for data analysis. The use of participants' responses from the interview questions (see Appendix C), and exploration of company documents aided in answering the central research question: What strategies do some insurance industry leaders use to reduce stress?

Morse (2015) and Yin (2014) explained methodological triangulation involves analyzing data from multiple data sources to ensure consistency across the span of information available on the subject. Furthermore, Yin argued methodological triangulation adds value to research quality and reduces bias. I utilized methodological triangulation to complete the study.

Yin (2014) noted a review of the transcribed data is necessary for the data analysis process. Fusch and Ness (2015) and Pierre and Jackson (2014) suggested the collected data requires analysis and coding to determine emerging themes. Marshall and Rossman (2016) also stated data analysis leads to data reduction and interpretation. I transcribed the audio recording and coded the interviews, using NVivo computer software. Yin also stated a computer software program could help the researcher identify

matching words or phrases found in the data, and sort, categorize, and code words for theme identification. After coding and analyzing the data with Nvivo, I identified the relevant themes for development of my study.

Percy, Kostere, and Kostere (2015) indicated thematic analysis is the process of identifying repeated patterns of words and phrases from qualitative data. Percy et al. further stated word repetition and new keywords are the fundamental techniques for theme identification. From the data analysis, I discovered five themes that were relevant to my study and could add value to my findings. After identifying and verifying the themes, I discussed each theme in detail, adding excerpts from the participants' interviews.

The final steps in the data analysis process were to develop and write the findings. Lensges, Hollensbe, and Masterson (2016) and Morse (2015) asserted data analysis and the final writing of findings are critical to the successful completion of the study. To further reinforce my data analysis and findings, I provided excerpts of the participants' views and remarks supporting the emerged themes in the final section of the study. I integrated information from the organizational documentation and applied the context of the conceptual framework to complete all aspects of verifying the findings. I concluded the data analysis process and developed the final sections of my study which included the applications to professional practice and implications for social change, and provided recommendations for action and further research, personal reflections, and my conclusions.

Reliability and Validity

Elo et al. (2014) argued researchers should scrutinize the trustworthiness of data at every phase of the analysis process, including the preparation, organization, and reporting of results. There are different criteria used to assess the reliability and validity of qualitative research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed four criteria: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability as the framework for establishing rigor. To establish credibility, researchers must ensure participants are accurately identified and described (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013). Elo et al. defined dependability as the stability of data over time and under different conditions. Confirmability refers to objectivity and implies the data accurately represent the information provided by the participants (Elo et al., 2014). Trainor and Graue (2014) explained transferability is similar to external validity. Trainor and Graue further stated transferability means research findings remain valid or make sense aligning with the research questions. To ensure alignment and consistency, I used an interview protocol and identified both assumptions and limitations affecting the study to enhance transferability.

Researchers interested in conducting a case study design can implement various strategies to ensure the rigor of the research. Elo et al. (2014) insisted reliability and validity depend on the availability of rich, appropriate, and well-saturated data. Researchers could employ observation, triangulation, peer debriefing, member checking, audit trail, reflexivity, and thick descriptions to achieve both reliability and validity (Houghton et al., 2013).

Researchers could employ member checking to achieve both reliability and validity (Tilley, 2015). Kidney and McDonald (2014) defined member checking as a process researchers use to ensure the interpreted data is the information provided by the participant during the data collection process. In the member checking process, participants review the transcribed data for accurate interpretations or changes (Kidney & McDonald, 2014; Tilley, 2015). To enhance the reliability and validity of the data collection process, I utilized member checking.

To further achieve rigor, the researcher must reach data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Researchers can reach data saturation when no additional or new information becomes evident (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Morse, 2015). A researcher's failure to reach data saturation can hamper the quality and validity of the study (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Lastly, Elo et al. (2014) contended the qualitative research interview can influence the reliability and validity of the study's content. Researchers use interviews to emphasize detail and holistic descriptions concerning an activity or situation from the participants' perspective (Yin, 2014).

Reliability

Darawsheh (2014) and Yin (2014) indicated reliability refers to the ability for other researchers to replicate a study with consistent and repeatable outcomes. Researchers must be transparent in the analysis and interpretation process (Darawscheh, 2014). Houghton et al. (2013) defined reliability as the degree to which the analysis yields stable and consistent outcomes.

Researchers can establish reliability through triangulation of the data, peer-reviewed literature, and member checking (Houghton et al., 2013; Ko & Boswell, 2013). According to Fusch and Ness (2015), researchers use triangulation to enhance reliability and attainment of data saturation in their studies. I employed data triangulation to increase reliability by reviewing multiple data sources to include peer-reviewed literature, data collected via interviews, and organizational documentation to increase the dependability of the conclusions.

Houghton et al. (2013) compelled researchers to employ member checking to improve reliability in the study. Member checking is the process of returning a summary to participants to ensure the accurate recording of the interviews; hence, becoming credible records (Houghton et al., 2013). Elo et al. (2014) stated researchers should continuously utilize member checking during the data analysis process. To increase the reliability of the exploration, I employed member checking to verify the interpretation of the data gathered during the interview.

Emerson (2015) indicated that during the interview, the process reaches a point when additional data provides no new information, suggesting the study reaches saturation. Fusch and Ness (2015) argued that to achieve saturation a minimum of five participants must engage in the interview process. A sample of nine participants located in Franklin County, Ohio participated in the interview and responded to the same interview questions concerning workplace stress. I continued interviewing participants until no new information or theme became available.

When the data from the interviews fail to reach data saturation, Emerson (2015) and Guro and Malin (2015) suggested a researcher utilize snowball sampling to acquire additional participants for the interview process. Emerson and Guro and Malin indicated snowball sampling is a popular sampling method used to generate knowledge from participants' recommendations of individuals with information about the issue. I did not use snowball sampling for this study.

Validity

Baskarada (2014) indicated researchers achieve validity when the study measures what it supposes to measure. Researchers should strive to ensure validity in every phase of the data analysis, beginning with preparation and ending with the reporting of the findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Morse, 2015). Baskarada said data quality is a fundamental validity criterion. From the validity perspective, researchers should document the measures used to create the answers (Baskarada, 2014; Yin, 2014). Researchers can ensure validity through quality dimensions including credibility, conformability, and transferability (Elo et al., 2014; Yin, 2014).

Trainor and Graue (2014) stated a credible study reflects an accurate description of the experiences shared by participants. To establish credibility, researchers can utilize member checking to ensure the experiences reflected in the report are valid interpretations (Elo et al., 2014). Kidney and McDonald (2015) indicated member checking is the process researchers use to ensure the interpreted data is the information provided by the participant during the data collection process. In the member checking process, participants review the transcribed data for accurate interpretations or changes

(Kidney & McDonald, 2014; Tilley, 2015). Therefore, I used member checking to establish credibility in my study.

Triangulation and saturation improve research validity by ensuring the researcher captures data by expanding the breadth and depth of inquiry. Marshall and Rossman (2016) stated that a researcher could enhance the validity of the study through methodological triangulation of data. Methodological triangulation is the process of collecting data from multiple sources (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Yin, 2014). For the study, I used methodological triangulation which included participant interviews and a review of organizational artifacts to ensure the validity of my study.

Researchers can reach data saturation when no additional or new information becomes evident during the interview process (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Morse, 2015). Researchers can reach data saturation by asking multiple participants the same questions until no new information emerges (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Gibbins, Bhatia, Forbes, & Reid, 2014). Nine participants partook in semistructured interviews and provided responses to the same open-ended interview questions. I continued to interview the participants until no new data became available or there were no new emerging themes.

Researchers should scrutinize the trustworthiness of data at every phase of the analysis process, including the preparation, organization, and reporting of results (Elo et al., 2014). The four criteria used to assess the reliability and validity of qualitative research are credibility, dependability, conformability, and transferability. Trainor and Graue (2014) stated creditability occurs when researchers accurately describe the experiences shared by the study participants. Elo et al. defined dependability as the

stability of data over time and under different conditions. Elo et al. (2014) and Morse (2015) explained conformability is the objective comparison between two or more conclusions to address the data's accuracy, relevance, or meaning. Trainor and Graue stated transferability means research findings remain valid or make sense aligning with the research questions. I utilized methodological triangulation and data saturation to ensure the credibility, confirmability, dependability, and transferability of the research findings.

Transition and Summary

In Section 2, I provided detailed descriptions of the role of the research, ethical research, data collection instruments and techniques, data analysis, and reliability and validity of the study. Also, provided in Section 2 was a description of triangulation, member checking, and protocols used to collect data. In Section 3, I defined the research process once completed, provided the theme development from the data collected, and described the study findings. Finally, my goal was to explain the recommendations arising from the study, the impact of social change, and my reflections on the research experience.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

In Section 3, I provided an introduction giving the reader an overview of the study. Also provided in this section is a discussion of the themes and my findings. Lastly, I discussed the applications to professional practice and implications for social change, and provided recommendations for action and further research, personal reflections, and my conclusions.

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative single-case study was to explore strategies some insurance industry leaders use to reduce stress. In Section 3, I presented an analysis of information gathered from face-to-face semistructured interviews with nine successful insurance industry leaders who held a leadership position for approximately five years, worked in stressful work environments, and possessed knowledge regarding the implementation of stress management strategies. Other sources of data included 2015 and 2016 employee engagement surveys. Five themes emerged through inductive coding and analysis: a supportive work environment, improved communications, optimal leadership, increased resources and training, and work-life balance. The findings showed the strategies leaders used to reduce stress in their organization to improve productivity were necessary for growth and sustainability.

Presentation of the Findings

The overarching research question for this qualitative explorative single-case study was: What strategies do insurance industry leaders apply to reduce stress? I used semistructured interviews with open-ended questions to encourage nine participants to

provide valuable information on successful strategies used to reduce workplace stress.

To initiate the interview process, all nine participants agreed to partake in the interview process by signing a consent form and receiving a signed copy as a record. Interviews took place at the selected organization in a private office and averaged 45 minutes from start to finish.

I applied a coding system to protect participant identity (P1, P2, and so on). Once I transcribed the interviews, I employed member checking by asking the participants to review the transcriptions for accuracy. Following the member checking process, all data was processed using NVivo. The use of NVivo was vital to enable me to familiarize myself with the research data and identify key themes in the collected data. The primary use of NVivo was to identify prominent themes emerging from the interviews. Finally, the data analysis exposed the following themes regarding workplace stress mitigation: a supportive work environment, improved communication, optimal leadership, increased resources and training, and work-life balance strategies.

Theme 1: A Supportive Work Environment

The first theme emerging from the data was the supportive work environment. The perception of one's work environment may impact an employee's stress levels. Johansen and Cadmus (2016) indicated employees' perceptions of the supervisor's support, fairness, and open communication enhances the workplace. Hill et al. (2015) and Johansen and Cadmus (2016) argued that a supportive work environment contributes to win-win solutions for both employees and the organization, reducing levels of work

stress. Hill et al. (2015) and Whitebird et al. (2013) stated a supportive work environment helps to promote the reduction of stress, thus increasing productivity.

The supportive work environment theme emerged from detailed responses provided by the participants and a review of organizational documents to triangulate the data. Nine insurance industry leaders contributed valuable data highlighting a supportive work environment as being essential for reduction of workplace stress. In the transcription excerpts, the participants defined a supportive work environment, gave examples of tools used to ensure supervisory support, fairness, and open communication, and discussed how a supportive work environment could help to minimize the adverse effects of stress.

P1 mentioned, “Managers should create a work environment where employees feel supported and receive fair treatment.” P2 added, and P3, P4, P6, P 7 and P8 agreed: “Managers need to walk around, being visible, engaging employees about work and life in general, and supporting ideas to improve the workplace.” P4 said, “Creating a more respectful workplace should include listening to employees’ concerns, addressing issues, implementing ideas to improve the work product and environment, and treating employees fairly.” P5 further asserted, “Get to know your employees and try to understand the issues that make them feel unsupported in the workplace.” All participants reported a supportive work environment leads to positive outcomes and minimizes stress. Finally, P9 indicated, “A supportive work environment strategy is successful when managers are honest, empathic, patient, caring, and genuinely interested in employee and organizational well-being.”

The P-E fit model helps the researcher to understand stress could result due to the absence of fit between a person and the work environment (Goh et al., 2015; Lu et al., 2013). The use of the P-E fit conceptual framework proved to generate critical information for organizations to consider when developing and implementing strategies to reduce stress. Takeuchi and Takeuchi (2013) explained P-E fit theory hinges on the level of stimuli preferred by individuals and the actual stimuli received in the workplace. The P-E fit model guided this research and helped to confirm a supportive work environment can reduce stress and improve employees' well-being when there is a fit between employees' needs and perceptions of supervisory support and fairness in the work environment. Lastly, the P-E theory helped to establish the framework to understand how an unsupported work environment impacts productivity and employees' well-being.

The findings indicated strategies are necessary to enrich the workplace and produce positive experiences for employees. The results suggested a supportive work environment could minimize the adverse effects of stress. The results further emphasized leaders could create supportive work environments by exhibiting management styles that include employee support, fairness, and open and efficient communication. The findings revealed leaders play a pivotal role in developing and maintaining a healthy work environment, thus igniting organizational support and improving well-being.

Theme 2: Improved Communication

Improved communication was the second theme emerging from the exploration of participants' responses. Kalish, Luria, Toker, and Westman (2015) asserted

communication is a practical tool used to facilitate the identification and mobilization of resources and give emotional and instrumental support, therefore enriching employee well-being. When leaders provide efficient and timely communication, employees can help to dispel rumors, trust the organization's vision, and commit to goals (Ahmeti, 2014). According to Cullen et al., (2014), communication is crucial for employees' understanding of organizational actions and decisions impacting their performance, which influences their attitudes towards their jobs. In addition to the verbal and visual aspects of communication, Ala-Kortesmaa and Isotalus (2015) declared listening is an active attribute of communication. Ala-Kortesmaa and Isotalus further asserted listening is the participatory process of receiving, constructing meaning, and responding to verbal and nonverbal messages. Almost, Wolff, Stewart-Pyne, McCormick, Strachan, and D'Souza (2016) indicated business owners could use communication to build collegial management and employee relationships, thus enhancing organizational outcomes, improving productivity, and fortifying a healthy, safe environment for employees.

The data from the interviews and archived documents revealed all participants (P1-P9) concurred communication is a crucial tool for reducing or eliminating workplace stress. P1-P9 agreed communication strategies are useful to deescalate tensions and help employees to destress. P1 explained, "Communication is key and should flow from senior leaders down to the rank and file. Communication and transparency are essential for efficient management and stress reduction." P2 said, "Communication should occur at the beginning, during, and after organizational changes or hard decisions impacting the workplace." Further, P3 stated, "Managers cannot overcommunicate." P4 indicated,

“Leaders should create an environment of understanding through communication.” P5 explained, “Business owners can promote organizational successes through open communication.” P4, P6, and P9 emphasized leaders should communicate with employees about the organization’s direction, thereby dispelling uncertainty about the future.

Listening is an active attribute of communication. P1 stressed, “Managers must listen to their staff to gather information to understand issues and find possible resolutions.” P2 added, “Listen to employees. Listen to frontline staff, calm the fears of the unknown, and consider everything.” P3 asserted, “Communication includes the ability to hear employees and quickly respond to their needs.” P4 emphasized, “Listening to them, removing roadblocks that prevent them from adequately performing their jobs.” P9 acknowledged, “Leaders could do a better job of providing information concerning decisions, changes, or the organization’s future direction and listening to employees.”

The conceptual framework for the research was the P-E fit theory. The P-E fit model guided this study and helped to confirm an improved communication strategy is necessary to reduce stress and improve employees’ well-being. Scholars determined the P-E fit theory was useful for exploring the causes of stress in the workplace and developing possible strategies to decrease stress and improve productivity (Goh et al., 2015). This approach was useful for exploring both the positive and negative outcomes of the communication process. The P-E fit theory was helpful for investigating the causes of stress in the workplace and formulation of strategies to improve

communication, ensure leaders understand the need for open communication, and engage staff to improve well-being and job performance. The P-E fit theory provided the mechanics to determine the fit between improved communication and the employees' health and well-being. Goh et al. (2015) explained the fundamental tenets of the P-E fit model are to expose misfit or mismatch of individuals' preferences and organizational deliverables leading to stress. Accordingly, the P-E-fit theory proved there must be a communication fit between the information provided and workers' perception of the information.

The study results endorsed the need for an improved communication strategy. The findings indicate improved communication is essential for reducing the causes of stress, improving job adjustment, and communication. From this theme, the results showed the improved communication strategy has a significant effect on psychological stress levels, thus becoming an efficient tool to improve employee performance. The study results could further assist leaders in recognizing improved communication as a necessary strategy to reduce stress and promote a healthy work environment.

Theme 3: Optimal Leadership

Optimal leadership was the third theme emerging from the exploration of participants' responses. Yilmaz et al. (2016) stated optimal leadership increases the efficiency of organizations in today's globally competitive environment. Yilmaz et al. argued optimal leadership occurs when leaders choose the right leadership style for the advancement of their organization's mission. Tourish (2014) defined optimal leadership as networks of positive interactions between managers and employees used to advance

organizational performance. Nielsen (2013) explained optimal leadership is a functional tool for leaders and should include the following characteristics: empowering employees to make decisions, recognizing and addressing issues, and managing with empathy and patience. Tourish further indicated optimal leadership should compel business leaders to recognize employees as active members of the organization and respect their contributions to the accomplishment of established goals.

The transcript excerpts supported the need for an optimal leadership strategy. The collected data disclosed how leaders should interact with employees, work to optimize employee and organizational well-being, and improve productivity. P2 indicated, “Management should work with staff to understand high-level decisions.” P1, P2, and P3 agreed managers should recognize employees are leaders who have a vested interest in the organization’s success. P4 said, “Employees should be allowed to make decisions concerning their work.” P5 expressed, “Leaders should view staff as subject matter experts.” P7 indicated, “Leaders should be in alignment with each other and the organization’s direction, therefore communicating the same message to staff.” P8 mentioned, “Supervisors should find a way to motivate their team, solicit feedback from individuals, and discuss strategies to correct and improve the workplace or product.” P9 stated, “Leaders should support their staff and ensure employees feel that they are worthwhile.” P1 through P9 agreed optimal leadership becomes the standard when managers are visible and accessible, set realistic job expectations, exhibit honest and trustworthy behaviors, treat employees fairly, and realize employees play active roles in the success of the organization.

The P-E-fit theory supported the notion that optimal leadership is vital to overall organizational health and improved well-being. The P-E-fit theory supports the idea of employee adjustment as being critical for overall organizational health; leaders play a role in employee adjustment (Nolan & Morley, 2014; Takeuchi & Takeuchi, 2013). I utilized the P-E fit theory to develop an understanding of the relationship between leadership, stress, and employees' well-being. Goh et al. (2015) indicated the P-E fit model generates critical information for organizations to consider regarding stress and developing strategies to address the factors leading to stress. The P-E fit model was appropriate for guiding the study and evaluating leadership to build strategies to minimize stress and increase productivity.

The exploration of the optimal leadership theme exposed the strategies managers need to address stress associated with the varying styles of leadership. The findings revealed the optimal leadership strategy is essential for the success of the organization and improving employees' health and well-being. The results denoted optimal leadership enriches the work environment, thus producing positive experiences for employees. The results further suggested leaders must choose the right leadership style at the appropriate time to achieve the organization's mission and improve performance. Finally, the findings exposed the traits leaders must possess to ignite organizational support, thus enhancing employees' satisfaction and well-being.

Theme 4: Increased Resources and Training

The increased resources and training initiative was the fourth theme emerging from the exploration of the participants' responses. Fida et al. (2015) indicated resources

are physical objects individuals need to accomplish work duties without interruption to overall performance. Bellou and Chatzinikou (2015) explained training prepares employees for new challenges, thus enhancing their ability to manage job demands and mitigate stress. Moura et al. (2014) said resources and training correlate with positive outcomes when these tools are available at the proper time and correct place. Tuckey, Chrisopoulos, and Dollard (2017) argued the correlation between job demands, training, and resources presents opportunities for leaders to address well-being at work, thereby reducing stress.

During the individual interviews, participants presented data reinforcing increased resources and training as being essential for reducing stress and improving performance. The increased resources and training theme is the area in which leaders have either the most or least control. Physical resources and training are accessible and quantifiable needs employees must have to complete their duties. P1 stated, “Managers must ensure employees’ basic needs are met to perform their work.” P2 emphasized, “Lack of resources and training are main contributors to stress.” P3 said, “Managers should ensure employees have the appropriate tools, job aids, and/or resources (such as proven knowledge, training, time, expertise in completing assignments).” P4 further noted, “Leaders should provide training at the right moment, so people can go out and implement what they learned.” P5 asserted, “Train employees before the implementation of a change or decision. Make sure your employees receive the appropriate training and resources.” P6 stated, “A lack of proper tools, job aids, and resources add to employees’ stress levels.” All participants (P1 through P9) assented employees feel stressed when

they lack the training to do their jobs, resources and tools, and time to complete assignments.

Goh et al. (2015) and Nolan and Morley (2014) noted the P-E fit theory has two components (a) demands-ability fit, and (b) needs-supplies fit. The P-E fit model theorized misfit in demands-ability and needs-supplies can have serious consequences, thus, causing negative consequences for both the organization and employees (Goh et al., 2015; Nolan & Morley, 2014). For the increased resources and training strategy to be effectual, the P-E fit theory implied there must be a match between the employees' needs or demands to complete their jobs and accessibility of resources and training. The P-E fit theory was appropriate for this study and the increased resources and training research.

The data collected from the interviews and archived documents aligned with the need for the increased resources and training theme. The findings showed individuals possessing the appropriate resources and training at the right time experience less stress. Moreover, the findings exposed leaders must assess when employees' need additional materials, information, and resources to perform their day-to-day work responsibilities; and employees have desires or need for more job-specific training. Finally, the finding disclosed leaders are responsible for supplying employees' basic work needs. When leaders fail to provide these requirements, initiatives become nonexistent, stress levels rise, and productivity suffers.

Theme 5: Work-life Balance

The fifth theme emerging from the data was the work-life balance strategy. Deery and Jago (2015) defined work-life balance as employees' ability to negotiate their time

between work, family, and non-work activities. The workplace is one environment where employees derive satisfaction; however, it might serve as a source of stress (Pidd et al., 2015). Robinson, Magee, and Caputi (2016) inserted satisfaction and happiness occur when the gains from one domain (work) maintain or endorse another area (family life).

The theme evolved from the detailed data provided by the participants and relevant literature. Research suggested work and family lives might become stressors when employees try to devote their time to both their jobs and families. Pidd et al. (2015) emphasized performance demands and work-family conflicts become evident when employees cannot balance the need to contend with both work and family responsibilities. Furthermore, employees who cannot separate work stresses from their family or personal lives might find themselves in work-life conflict (Zheng, Molineux, Mirshekary, and Scarparo, 2015).

All participants agreed there is a correlation between work-life balance and workers' health and well-being. P1 through P9 acquiesced leaders should understand employees have lives outside of the workplace and can bring those lives into the workplace. P1 stated, "Managers should be empathic to employees' life situations and direct them to the appropriate resources to address issues." P3 asserted, "External factors such as family concerns and environmental issues impact well-being." P4 stated, "Leaders should show employees sympathy or empathy when they must deal with work or life issues." P5 indicated, "Managers must understand home life can impact work life." P6 stated, "Supervisors should show employees sympathy and empathy when

dealing with work-life issues.” P8 added, “Leaders must understand how external stressors such as divorce, illness, death, or financial matters contribute to employee stress.” P1 through P9 agreed internal stressors such as retirement, job change, layoffs, trying to please everyone, fear of failure, work area changes, and a lack of training or resources negatively influence well-being and productivity.” Lastly, P8 stated, “Managers should give the employee the release time to take care of family or personal issues.”

The P-E fit model maintains a lack of fit between work demands and needs impact employees stress levels and overall well-being (Goh et al., 2015). The P-E fit theory suggests decreased well-being and productivity occurs when there is a mismatch between the person’s needs and what they receive or confront at work (Goh et al., 2015; Rauthmann, 2014). The P-E fit theory was useful in determining the match or mismatch between the individual, family issues, and work demands and productivity. Nolan & Morley (2014) contended a demand match or needs match can cause a reduction in stress and increase in well-being, whereby a mismatch produces increased stress and diminished well-being. The P-E fit theory was the appropriate model to determine how stress levels rise when employees experience conflict between work and family, and decrease when no conflict exists. The P-E fit theory was appropriate for this study and work-life balance research.

The findings exposed that leaders need strategies to address work-life balance issues impacting well-being and productivity. The data from the interviews disclosed work-life issues add to the complexity of addressing stress. The conclusions drawn from

the research indicated that when there is a conflict between work and family, employees might suffer high levels of stress. Conversely, employees who maintain a good balance between work and life experience increased health and satisfaction. The findings disclosed a work-life balance culture within the organization reduces stress, decreases costs, and enhances productivity. Additionally, the results exposed viable strategies to improve work-life balance include time off, flexible work schedules, workplace support, humor, fun activities, and reductions in work duties. As a final point, the results showed a strong correlation between work-life balance, health, and wellbeing.

Applications to Professional Practice

The business problem and the purpose of conducting the study were to explore strategies insurance industry leaders use to reduce or eliminate stress to improve productivity. Workplace stress, originating from characteristics of the work itself, excessive workload, social, role-based issues, weak leadership, role ambiguity, and feelings of being unappreciated or undervalued, costs US industries \$300 billion annually (CDC, 2014). Employees experiencing undue workplace stress compromise the performance of businesses contributing to the decline in overall employee productivity and morale (MacFadyen, 2015). The findings of this study may assist business owners with identifying and addressing causes and symptoms of workplace stress. I conducted interviews with nine insurance industry leaders to investigate how successful business managers addressed workplace stress. These findings suggested five strategies business leaders could develop and implement to reduce workplace stress and increase productivity.

A Supportive Work Environment

The interview data provided detailed, objective evidence leaders to consider in the creation of a supportive work environment. The strategy offers a pathway for business leaders to establish and enhance a healthy, nurturing work environment ensuring employees have opportunities to participate in the decision-making initiatives within the workplace (Hill et al., 2015). Leaders may experience improved workplace cultures by implementing initiatives such as identifying and responding to employees' needs, providing support, fostering an environment of tolerance, encouraging professional growth, and showing compassion (Whitebird et al., 2013).

Improved Communication

Business leaders can apply the improved communication strategies highlighted by the participants to learn about the issues impacting employees. By being open and listening to employees, business leaders could learn about their employees and what issues they identify as particularly stressful. The improved communication strategy shared and used by the participants contained the following ideas: being transparent, removing unknowns; communicating to instill hope, direction, clarity, and motivation; and implementing the principles of inclusion to strengthen the bond between business leaders and employees. Open and honest communication might aid business leaders in promoting a healthy work environment; therefore, increasing profits paired with improved performance (Hill et al., 2015).

Optimal Leadership

The study participants indicated successful business leaders establish and support realistic job expectations to foster employee retention and workplace harmony. Optimal leadership styles encompass responsiveness to employees' needs and pressures and adjust workloads to promote employee wellness (Diebig et al., 2017). Business leaders may learn from the contributions of the participants and may develop optimal leadership strategies to partner with employees to devise plans to encourage workers' well-being, growth, and security. Ganster and Rosen (2015) stated business owners use diverse leadership styles, changing the style over time to optimize organizational growth and sustainability.

Increased Resources and Training

Business leaders wanting to achieve organizational goals might benefit from the increased resources and training strategy. Increased resources and training contribute to the expansion of workers' knowledge and abilities, promote career advancement, and retain experienced employees. Business owners must provide employees with essential tools and training to complete tasks, increased resources and training aid in promoting innovation and creativity (Beehr et al., 2015). Fida et al. (2015) further suggested the proper allocation of funds for both resources and training promotes business leaders' commitment to mutually, respectful relationships with employees while boosting business performance and employee retention.

Work-Life Balance

Employees carry the burdens of stress from home to work. The findings proved a work-life balance strategy is necessary to tackle the many challenges found in the workplace. Business owners who recognize the need for work-life balance strategies might reap the benefits from the flexibility employees enjoy or need to balance work and life commitments (Darawsheh, 2014). The research further showed employees thrive in work cultures allowing work-life balance. Deery and Jago (2015) argued work-life balance establishes the foundation for employees to address life issues without jeopardizing their jobs, respond to work challenges in a less destructive way, and experience a long, healthy relationship with the employer.

Implications for Social Change

According to the BLS (2014), stress accounts for \$26 billion in medical and disability payments and \$95 billion in lost productivity per year. These expressed burdens on society deplete the healthcare system, reduce family income, and place greater responsibility on additional resources within the community to address stress related issues. The target of workplace initiatives to reduce stress is the employee. The findings might positively impact workplace stress by ensuring a supportive work environment that contributes to well-being, improving communication, choosing leadership to optimize productivity, supplying the resources and training needed to accomplish tasks, and presenting opportunities to enjoy work-life balance. Happy, satisfied employees work to bring peace and harmony in their jobs, homes, and communities (Deery & Jago, 2015). Employees and families experiencing less stress

may discover opportunities to help others and lend support to create a more harmonious, healthy, and enriched society. As more business owners adopt practices to support employees and reduce workplace stress, communities may witness improved communication and enhanced family involvement in social events, thus fueling overall wellness.

Recommendations for Action

Business leaders can use the information shared in this study to implement effective strategies to reduce stress and increase productivity. By employing some of the strategies shared by participants, managers can minimize stress, which might help improve employees' well-being. The findings may be valuable for business owners facing difficulties in responding to workplace stress and have employees exhibiting symptoms or expressing claims of disharmony or discomfort resulting from the working environment. Business owners who may not have these experiences, but want to develop initiatives to prevent workplace stress may apply the strategies highlighted in this study.

The findings may prompt business owners to investigate strategies to address their unique situations leading to stress. I propose business owners choose initiatives in this study to identify and respond to employees' needs, provide support, and foster environments of tolerance for all employees. To improve communication among managers and their staff, business owners should engage the support of various managers, human resource specialists, volunteers, community service agencies, and other stakeholders to help establish open, honest engagement with employees. I further

recommend managers use active listening skills to identify and address issues leading to stress.

The participating company's administrator, study participants, and Human Resources managers will receive a summary of the findings including the conclusions and recommendations. The published study will also be available through the ProQuest/UMI Dissertation database for future scholars and other interested stakeholders. Finally, I will seek opportunities to publish my study in a stress management journal, perhaps the Journal of Business Management or Journal of Organizational Behavior.

Recommendations for Further Research

The findings of this study may encourage future research to investigate the themes: a supportive work environment, improved communication, optimal leadership, increased resources and training, and work-life balance germane to developing strategies to address stress in other industries. Particularly industries with inherent stressors such as an emergency services agency, medical services organization, or related institutions, might conduct research that creates valuable information for leaders to consider when addressing stress and decreased productivity. The limitations of this study include a lack of generalizability, which the additional application of quantitative inquiry may mitigate this limitation. The utilization of quantitative research can add to the exploration of the extent of stress by comparing one industry to another, or perhaps other indicators as comparisons, such as age, gender, or geographic area. Another limitation is the limited information gathered through the case study approach, to mitigate this in a future study, a researcher may conduct a narrative study. Likewise, the narrative approach might allow

researchers to investigate the symptoms and effects of stress targeting those impacted by stress rather than business leaders, to include how stress manifests in many areas of an employee's life. By expanding the research beyond Franklin County, Ohio and venturing into other counties, countries, or nations, the findings may broaden the understanding and extent of workplace stress.

Reflections

I began the doctorate process not knowing what to expect. The journey proved to be difficult but fulfilling. The work was challenging, but most of the professors were just a call away and helped during each step of the process. I must admit there were some bumps in the road and restless nights. Patience and a positive attitude were the attributes needed to achieve goals.

Reflecting on the research and analysis processes, I gained a better understanding of the phenomenon, in a real-life context. I learned the participants' cooperation and forthrightness helped to develop a valid study, which can aid business leaders in making informed business decisions. From the results, viable strategies became evident and might become the tools leaders could use to address issues in their organizations.

At the completion of this study, I found a renewed understanding of the doctoral research processes required to draw valid conclusions. Each step of this journey provided me an opportunity to understand the phenomenon under investigation, collect relevant data, complete data analysis, and determine useable findings for future business research. I now possess a solid foundation to begin and conclude research that may lead to social change and contribute to business practice.

Conclusion

Workplace stress costs U. S. industries billions of dollars annually and may originate from characteristics of the work itself, excessive workload, social, role-based issues, weak leadership, role ambiguity, and feelings of being unappreciated or undervalued (CDC, 2014). Employers are under extreme competitive pressures to survive and progress in today's economic climate (Lu, Wang, Lu, Du, & Bakker, 2014). Employers need tools to address stressors and stress reactions, encourage positive work behaviors, improve performance, and increase organizational profitability (Arnetz et al., 2013; D'Ettorre & Greco, 2015).

The research exposed strategies applied by insurance leaders to mitigate or respond to workplace stress. Through a detailed interview process and review of company documents, the overarching data supports the need for a rigorous approach by insurance leaders to identify strategies to detect and reduce issues contributing to a stressful workplace. Five themes emerged during my research and deserved exploration which were a supportive work environment, improved communication, optimal leadership, increased resources and training, and work-life balance.

Developing and fostering supportive work environments are paramount for leaders wanting to address the many challenges leading to stress and low production. Business leaders need strategies that focus on redesigning the structure of the work environment that supports employees and enhances working conditions. A supportive work environment contributes to win-win solutions for both employees and the organization, thereby, reducing levels of work stress (Johansen & Cadmus, 2016).

Further, a supportive work environment endorsed by business owners, lead employees to a higher sense of ownership and commitment to the organization (Wyatt et al., 2015).

While this study revealed several strategies to reduce stress, improved communication seemed to be most prevalent for the achievement of set goals. Stress results from leaders' miscommunication or lack of communication. Improved communication adds to employees' understanding of organizational actions and decisions impacting their performance and attitudes towards their jobs. Communication has a significant effect on psychological stress levels, thus, becoming an efficient tool to improve employee performance (Robertson, 2017). It is important leaders learn to communicate to realize positive work outcomes.

From the study findings, leaders may discover optimal leadership could enhance the performance of organizations and facilitate the attainment of goals. Optimal leadership occurs when leaders choose the right leadership style at the right time to advance their organizations (Tourish, 2014; Yilmaz et al., 2016). Furthermore, optimal leadership could improve employees' attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs (Leary et al., 2013).

Resources and training are the tools leaders can best control. Fida et al. (2015) stated internal frustrations such as lack of resources and training affect employees' ability to perform their job and adds to the work-related stress. When resources and training are not available for the completion of duties, employees begin to stress and fail at their jobs (MacFadyen, 2015). Increased resources and training correlate with positive outcomes.

It is imperative that leaders invest in these tools to de-stress employees for the betterment of organizational performance (Moura et al., 2014).

The right balance between work and employees' personal lives has a significant influence on improving employees' health and well-being. The tools and techniques leaders employ to ensure work-life balance can create positive and satisfying experiences for employees (Deery & Jago, 2015). Leaders who invest the time, money, and energy in work-life balance strategies might find employees are less stressed and more productive (Robinson et al., 2016).

In conclusion, business leaders must not forget the key to corporate success in the current competitive environment is its employees (Blumberga & Austruma, 2015). In this setting, managers must be able to organize the work to reach targets and desired financial results. There must be trust between leaders and their subordinates. Business owners must have confidence in their staff to act independently, provide a positive psychological climate, give support, openly communicate, and promote well-being for all employees (Blumberga & Austruma, 2015).

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Appendix A: Letter of Invitation

Dear Participant:

My name is Rhonda Bell and I am a Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) candidate at Walden University. My central research question is what strategies do some insurance industry leaders use to reduce stress. Based on your management and supervision experience, I would like to invite you to participate in my study regarding strategies business leaders could develop and implement to reduce employees' stress levels.

The information you may provide will help business leaders understand and implement strategies to reduce stress in their organizations. Also, I am inviting you to share with me any documents, e-mail messages, reports, and/or memoranda you feel might provide additional information concerning examples of employee stress or strategies to address stress-related issues.

I am inviting you to participate in my study because you meet the following criteria (a) possess leadership responsibilities in Franklin County, Ohio; (b) held a leadership position for approximately five years and has the authority to make decisions concerning employees' well-being; (c) work in stressful work environments; and (d) have knowledge concerning the implementation of stress management strategies.

Please be advised your participation in my study will be instrumental in collecting relevant data to understanding stress and strategies you have implemented to enhance employees' work engagement. I believe your perspectives will provide relevant, timely, and useful information for the completion of my study. At the completion of my study, the information learned during the research and analysis processes may help your organization find new interventions to improve employees' work engagement. Also, you and your organization may discover new strategies to discover and address unknown stress-related issues.

Please understand your participation in the study is voluntarily. In addition, please be aware you will not be compensated for your participation or time. Finally, please be aware your decision to decline or discontinue in the study will not exclude you from any benefits gained from this study.

To collect the needed data, I am inviting you to participate in a semistructured interview requiring 30 - 45 minutes of your time. During the interview, you will provide your perspectives by responding to 8 interview questions and play an active part in the data collection process. Following the interviews, the data will be transcribed and disseminated to the you for member checking (reviewing and verifying accuracy of the interpreted data). The member checking process will require 60 minutes of your time. Please understand the data collected will remain entirely

confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the student's supervising faculty/staff without permission from the Walden University IRB.

If you have any questions or require additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me at (614) 432-9307 or Rhonda.bell2@waldenu.edu. In addition, any questions you may have about participant rights should be directed to Dr. Leilani Endicott, Walden University Representative, at 1-800-295-3368, Ext. 3121210.

I look forward to hearing from you in the very near future. Thank you in advance for taking the time to assist me in this matter.

Sincerely,

Rhonda G. Bell

Appendix B: Letter of Cooperation

Dear Ms. Xxxx,

Based on my review of your research proposal, I give permission for you to conduct the study entitled What Strategies Do Some Insurance Industry Leaders Use to Reduce Stress within our organization. I authorize you to recruit our managers for your study. We will provide you a list with email addresses of leaders who meet your set criteria (a) possess leadership responsibilities in Franklin County, Ohio; (b) has held a leadership position for approximately five years and has the authority to make decisions concerning employees' well-being; (c) works in stressful work environments; and (d) is knowledgeable in implementing stress management strategies. Please be aware individuals' participation will be voluntary and at their own discretion.

We understand you will be conducting semistructured interviews requiring 30 - 45 minutes of participants' time. The participants involved in the interviews will provide their perspectives by responding to 8 interview questions and play an active part in the data collection process. Following the interviews, the data will be transcribed and disseminated to the individuals for member checking (reviewing and verifying accuracy of the interpreted data). The member checking process will require an additional 60 minutes of the participants' time. We further understand the transcribed and verified information will be utilized for the data analysis and completion of the study. We are aware the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the student's supervising faculty/staff without permission from the Walden University IRB. Finally, we understand all collected data will be kept in a locked secure place for a period of 5 years and destroyed immediately at the expiration of documented time.

We understand that our organization's responsibilities include providing access to (a) leaders meeting the above criteria and their email addresses, (b) meeting space if available, and (c) meeting times. We reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if our circumstances change.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting and that this plan complies with the organization's policies.

I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the student's supervising faculty/staff without permission from the Walden University IRB.

Sincerely,

Authorization Official

Appendix C: Interview Questions

1. What contributes to stress?
2. What behaviors exhibited by employees, if any, led to your response to stress?
3. What work-related characteristics or tasks may create stress for employees?
4. What strategies have you implemented to help employees reduce or eliminate stress?
5. What preventive measures help mitigate work-related stress?
6. What impact do preventive and remedial initiatives used to mitigate work-related stress have on organizational profits?
7. What strategies would you recommend to leaders to help employees cope with or eliminate work-related stress to improve production and/or increase profitability?
8. What additional information can you provide to help me understand successful approaches to stress?

Appendix D: Interview Protocol

A. IRB Approval

Before starting the study, I will seek permission from Walden's IRB Committee for approval of my study. After receiving the IRB approval, I will collect data via semistructured interviews with 8 participants.

B. Data Collection Procedures

1. Contact selected company for permission to contact leaders for participation in my study.
2. If permission is granted, request contact information for potential study participants.
3. If permission is denied, contact an alternative company for permission to utilize employees for participation in my study.
4. Send potential study participants an email inviting them to participate in the study. The email will include introduction letter outlining the purpose of the study and my contact information.
5. From the potential participant pool, select eight leaders to interview.
6. Personally telephone the participants to thank them, and answer any questions.
7. Schedule time and place for interview.
8. Two days prior to the scheduled interview, call each participant to confirm participation, time, and place.
9. Make changes as needed. Schedule an alternative date for meeting changes and follow-up.
10. Arrive early at interview location. Prepare the location for documenting and recording the interview. Setup pencils, paper, and recording device.
11. Meet with each participant at scheduled time and place.
12. Provide each participant an informed consent form for review and signature.
13. Collect informed consent form and provide the participant with a copy.
14. Seek permission to record the interview session.
15. Start interview process by initiate predetermined open-ended questions.
16. After all questions have been asked and answered, conclude the interview session by thanking the participant and advising of the transcription and member-checking processes.
17. Send transcribed data via email for member-checking. Approximately 7 days after interview.
18. Asks for corrections, changes, and additions to be provided within 7 days.
19. Follow-up with a thank you call.
20. Determine if snowball sampling is necessary to reach saturation.
21. If additional interviews are necessary, make the needed and follow interview protocol.
22. Conclude the data collection process.